Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

September
1925
25¢

Stories by
O. Henry
H. P. Lovecraft
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and other authors

THE GARGOYLE
A TALE OF DEVIL WORSHIP
by Greye La Spina

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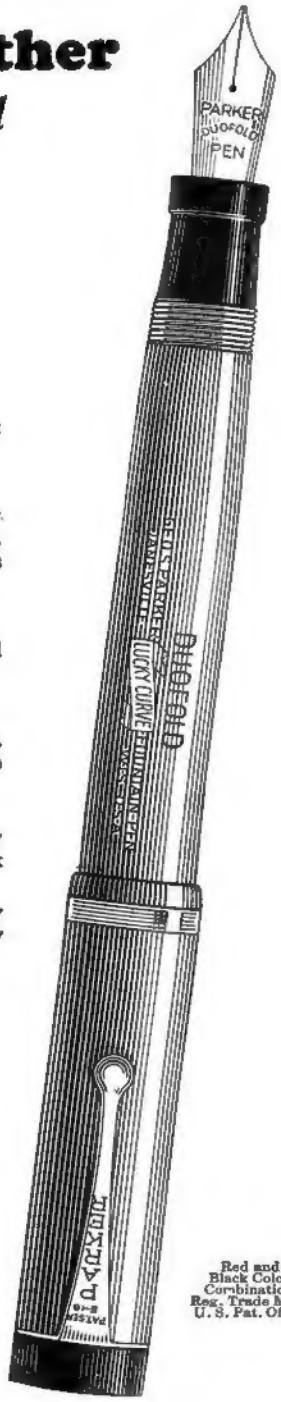

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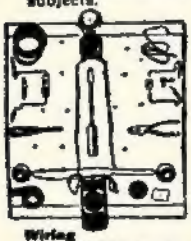

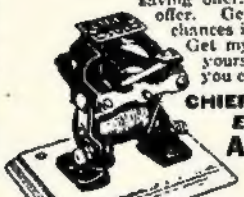

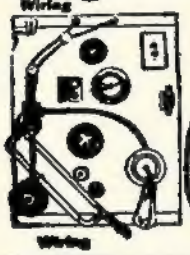

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VOLUME VI NUMBER 3

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THE GARGOYLE

A Novel of Devil Worship

by Greye La Spina

Author of "Invaders From the Dark," "The Tortoise-Shell Cat," etc.

CHAPTER I.

ALIAS CAGLIOSTRO.

LUKE PORTER had just ordered supper. His waitress, a chatty and pert young country woman, hesitated before departing for the kitchen; it was obvious that she had something on her mind. Luke's light gray eyes twinkled at her half confusion; he was enjoying the play of expression over her face and had no intention of helping her out. At his open amusement she took heart.

"There's a party outside who wants to know if he can have his supper with you," she told him finally. "He says you don't know him, but he thinks he has something interesting to tell you."

"He does, eh?" Luke laughed softly. "Why does he think I will be interested in his information?"

The young woman put her hand into her gingham apron pocket and drew out a newspaper clipping which she held toward him. She waited in silence until the young man had read it, and when he looked up, his face alight with interest, she had her turn at laughter.

"Huh! Changed your mind, didn't you, mister? Shall he come in?"

"Tell him if he doesn't come, I'll go out and pull him in," exclaimed Luke, and once more bent his gaze upon the clipping.

It was a rather astonishing advertisement:

OCCULTIST.—I want an initiate occultist of mature years, with an assistant youth of fine physique and handsome, to aid in the completion of important occult experiment. For particulars, address Occult Book Concern, 40 Park Row, New York City.

As Luke stared incredulously, something happened to the print; it went blurry, and then cleared up to a few words in an expanse of white. For a moment he could not understand what had happened; then he read the visiting card that had been laid upon the clipping, and lifted his eyes to see the owner of that formidable and mysterious *Cagliostro Moderno, Initiate Occultist.*

Imagination had conjured up almost instantaneously a tall and slender figure of fearsome dignity, with flashing black eyes. What confronted him as he rose instinctively to his feet was a black-cloaked form of hardly middle height but of heavy build. The individual enveloped in the cloak was so holding it that his face was almost hidden; all that showed was a small,

buttonlike nose, above which peered pale blue eyes squinting involuntarily as if in distaste at the light which flooded the room in true country hostelry fashion. Carrot-colored hair stood in a stiff pompadour above a sallow face.

"Mr. Moderno?" queried Luke uncertainly.

The mysterious stranger bowed with tremendous dignity.

"Will you be seated, sir? And will you mercifully explain this?"

Luke lifted the newspaper clipping and his gray eyes searched the sallow countenance of the stranger, who seated himself opposite and at once became a figure of far more impressiveness, owing to the fact that his body was long, making him seem much taller, when seated, than he really was. He threw back the black mantle, displaying a flame-colored lining covered with symbolic figures embroidered in various shades. But in tossing back the mantle, he also uncovered his face, so that the combination of button nose, cupid's bow mouth and squinting pale blue eyes made up an ensemble oddly at variance with his air of mystery and importance.

"Call me Cagliostro," he commanded severely. "Young man, are you married?"

Luke parried.

"Well—what if I am?" he asked. "How can it matter to you?"

"It may matter much to me—and to you as well. Do not be flippant. Give me a direct answer. Upon your single status much depends."

Luke's firm lips curled whimsically at the corners.

"Good friend Cagliostro, I am still heart-whole and fancy-free."

The unknown drew what was obviously a deep sigh of relief.

"Then you can serve as my assistant," he exclaimed, pointing at the clipping which Luke still held between thumb and forefinger of one well-formed hand.

"But, my good chap, I don't know anything about magic of any kind," the young man retorted, humoring what certainly appeared to be a harmless madman. "All my magic consists of splashing colors on canvas."

"But you are young—and good-looking—and unmarried," the unknown insisted. "And my nephew disappointed me at the last moment," he confided, leaning across the table and unbending sufficiently from his high pose to look pleadingly at the artist.

Luke Porter stared incredulously at his *vis-à-vis*, the impulse to shout with laughter seizing almost irresistibly upon him. The man was amusing in his gravity.

"Have some of this steak," he offered. "Potatoes? As long as you are here, you'd better help me eat, good Cagliostro. And then, out with the whole story. You can't expect me to be your assistant unless you tell me the situation, you know."

Cagliostro Moderno hesitated, the squinting blue eyes searchingly upon Luke. Then he let himself relax comfortably in his chair, held out the plate the waitress had provided for the unexpected guest, and began to talk incoherently. Luke listened, and began to gather in details of an eery situation, the like of which he had never in his life believed possible.

SOMEWHERE in the Pennsylvania woods near Shakerville, about a mile up Woddy Ridge from the main road between Shakerville and Spinnerton, there was the replica of a medieval castle, called Fanewold by the owners. This castle had been built by the present Madam Fane in her girlhood, as a surprize for her young husband. Madam Fane had had all the money, but the young husband had not remained with her long after the birth of their child, a boy; he had

deserted her, eloping with a country girl from a near-by farm. Since that time Madam Fane had shut herself up with her son in the castle, surrounded by faithful servants, rendered blind, deaf and dumb by the large wages they received.

It was the son, Guy Fane, who was a student of the occult, and who had advertised through the book concern for another occultist to aid him in his experiments. At this point in his recital, Cagliostro grew somewhat darker of color, and drew out a smaller business card than the important one he had first given the artist. On it was printed in unobtrusive lettering: *Herbert Binney. Rare books. Occult books a specialty.*

"That is the name given me at birth," explained he, the pale blue eyes watchfully on Luke's face to detect the slightest tendency to amusement. "Cagliostro is the name I have —ah—earned, by my research along occult lines. You can readily understand, Mr.—Porter—thank you—that 'Binney' is hardly a name to command such respect as an adept magician merits."

"Naturally, Mr. Binney," agreed Luke, the mobile lips twitching.

"Cagliostro, please," corrected the mage pointedly. "Well, by reason of my correspondence with the book concern, it believed me to be the proper person to attend Mr. Fane in his experiments." He lifted his round little chin; his chest swelled perceptibly.

"Astonishing!"

"I therefore selected my sister's son, a young and handsome boy, to be my assistant, although what Mr. Fane wishes a green youth for is beyond my comprehension," puzzled Cagliostro. "But Bobby got cold feet just before I left, because he was invited to a costume ball and didn't want to miss it," with cold disdain.

"So you are in need of a handsome young man who isn't tied to a wife?" laughed Luke, pushing away his plate and leaning back in his chair easily. "How are you to know I'm not lying, when I say I'm single?"

Cagliostro stiffened. The squinty blue eyes narrowed.

"It would not be easy to deceive *me*, Mr. Porter," he declared impressively. "I asked you, to be sure, but that was to give you a chance to declare yourself. I *knew* you weren't married."

"You did? May I ask how?"

"By your eagle look."

"My—?" puzzled Luke.

"You look free—wild—ah—" and the mage, at a loss for appropriate words, waved his hands expressively, displaying on one pudgy finger an oddly carved ring with a heavy blood-red stone.

"I see," murmured Luke, smiling.

"You will go with me after dinner," asserted Cagliostro, with the mien of one who has untold resources at his back to enforce his wishes, "to Fanewold. Whatever emolument I receive for my occult services shall be evenly divided with you. But go alone I dare not, after my correspondence with Mr. Fane. The handsome, unmarried assistant is absolutely obligatory," he finished pleadingly.

"My good Cagliostro," Luke retorted with a slight smile, "I am on my way to Bauers Ridge to visit an old college friend who spends his summers on a farm there. I haven't seen him for four years. I certainly do not intend to give up my visit to go on such a wild goose chase as you have outlined. I am an artist, not a magician."

Cagliostro rose from his seat, drawing the black mantle about him again with an impressive air. One arm held it across his face, hiding all but the small blue eyes that now flashed with a suddenly steely light at the imperturbable young artist.

"I shall be on my way," he announced, "in the taxi I ordered. But I warn you, young man, that before

the evening is old you will be at my side, acting in the capacity I have outlined. I need you. And when Cagliostro Moderno needs anything, the whole universe swings that thing toward him," he finished majestically, and stalked toward the dining room door.

At the entrance he turned.

"Shall I dismiss the taxi?" he insinuated, the mantle slipping sufficiently to discover the button nose that looked so childish on the small round face. "Then you can take me there directly in your roadster."

Luke got up from the table a trifle impatiently. His gray eyes darkened.

"My good Cagliostro, when I say a thing I mean it," he remarked pointedly. "I am not going to Fanewold. I am going up the pike, down the third road to the right, and then the first road to the left."

"Down the first road to the left?" repeated the occultist. A sudden flash of expression went across his face. He laughed outright. "Good-night—or rather, *auf Wiedersehen,*" he said mockingly as he went out of the room.

"Now what the devil did he mean by that?" wondered the artist, as he drove his roadster down the pike half an hour later. "Too darn sure of getting what he wants, that fellow. If I weren't afraid old Ralph might go back to the city in another week or ten days, I'd take up with friend Binney's offer. It was mighty intriguing."

The October dusk was gathering swiftly. Luke switched on his headlights and proceeded with caution along the country road, the third to his right. After going about three miles, he met another car, and the two cars had to manage rather carefully to avoid the deep ditches outlining the road on either side. As the other car passed, the driver leaned out and hailed Luke.

"Your name's Porter, ain't it? The old guy says not to forget the first turn to the left," he yelled.

"Much obliged!" the artist shouted, as he got his car back on to the road and drove slowly away.

He was just a little irritated by the reminder from the occultist, who had only too evidently not forgotten the necessity of a young and handsome assistant, and was still hopeful that Luke might change his mind.

The first road to the left proved to be a dirt road with deep ruts, obviously one that did not see much traffic. Luke turned down it, driving cautiously. The road led, winding, into the very heart of a forest. It went more and more deeply. The headlights darted weirdly between serried ranks of crowding trees, until the wood seemed full of awesome shades that slipt behind the shelter of tree trunks as Luke drove on into their midst. It was, somehow, strangely oppressive and ominous to the sensitive perception of the young artist. He told himself that he would not particularly care to pass the night in such a place, alone, among those slinking shadows. And then, in the glare of the headlights, there appeared another shadow, detached from those that slunk back, massing behind him as he drove on.

Black, with flapping ebon wings that waved on either side as it came toward him, like a tremendous bat running on hind legs down the roadway to intercept him, the *thing* advanced, stumbling, tripping, but ever nearer.

Luke felt his blood chill in his veins. He dared not drive directly upon that black *thing* in his way. He stopped the car, letting the engine run. What in God's universe could it be?

And then it came into the full glare of the headlights, and it had a white face like a man's. . . . It *was* a man. . . . The black wings were only the

flapping corners of a great mantle. . . . It was a man, and as it ran, it moaned as if in pain.

Luke stared, incredulous. Stopped the engine. Sprang out of the car to meet him. For he saw now who it was. It was the little occultist, staring-eyed, white face drawn into a Greek tragic mask of horror. He was moaning as he ran blindly along the roadway.

The artist stopped him with a hand on his shoulder as the little man would have fled back along the road toward the pike. And at the touch of Luke's hand, Herbert Binney collapsed like a pricked balloon, tumbling all in a heap upon the road, with a quavering screech of unutterable fear and horror pushing between his distorted lips.

CHAPTER 2.

AN APPEAL FOR HELP.

EVEN in prohibition days a man can, at a pinch, provide himself with brandy or whisky, if he knows where to go for it. And there are moments when such stimulants are grave necessities. The emergency called for Luke's flask, and he had the satisfaction a little later of seeing the occultist's pale blue eyelids flicker, then tighten as if apprehensive of what they might look upon if they opened.

"All right, friend Cagliostro?" queried the artist, giving the fainting man a slight shake.

The squinting eyes opened widely and fell upon Luke's handsome face in the full glare of the headlights. The squared mouth relaxed with obvious relief. Binney reached out convulsively to grasp Luke's hand.

"God be thanked! You are real! Oh! Oh!" And then the thought of something came back to him, for he staggered up from the roadway, looking apprehensively in the direction from which he had been running. "Did you see anything?" he quavered, very little of the impressive initiate left in his manner. "Did—was there anything after me?"

Luke shook his head. He peered down the road, but there was nothing now. The car stood quiet; the shadows which had but a few minutes ago been slinking from trunk to trunk now remained in ominous hiding. The roadway loomed darkly up a steep and stony slope, unlighted by the headlights because of its pitch.

"Can you—can you turn around here?" quavered Herbert Binney, one pudgy hand grasping Luke's firm arm.

"Why should I turn around?" disgustedly.

"Because—because—this isn't the right road for you, Mr. Porter."

"I took the first turn to the left," disputed Luke. "This is the way to Bauers Ridge, isn't it?"

Binney let out a squeak of nervous laughter, which he almost as instantly hushed, with that same apprehensive look up the road.

"You took the first *turn* to the left," he explained, "but this is a private lane, not the first *road* to the left, which you should have taken about half a mile farther on. This is a private lane leading to Fanewold," he finished.

Luke stared at him, half irritated, half amused.

"And you were careful to confuse me, so that I would take it and appear at Fanewold as your assistant?" he accused. "Well, now that I'm here, do you mind telling me if you were coming to meet me? If not, why were you running away?"

"Good God! I wasn't meeting anybody!" cried the occultist wildly. "I was—well—not running away." He stopped, then went on a little defiantly. "Yes, I was running away! You'd have done it, too, if you'd been in my place. God, if you'd seen what I did!" His voice rose in a shrill tremolo of emotion. "I saw—

the *devil himself!* Yes, I *did!* Don't dispute me, Mr. Porter, I beg of you. I'm not a lunatic. I'm a sane man. I'm a man who has seen many strange, supernatural phenomena. But —never before—*never*, I say—did I see the DEVIL *in propria persona*. Good God! it was horrible!"

"You'd better get into my car," suggested the artist. "I'll go along here and take a look at Beelzebub, friend Cagliostro. When we've found him, you'll probably discover that you're mistaken—"

"No, no, no!" denied the occultist hurriedly. "I couldn't have been mistaken. The taxi driver left me about a hundred yards from the castle draw, because he was superstitious. I walked up to the moat by myself, carrying my bags. And I was standing there, wondering how I could announce my arrival, when the moon came out from behind the clouds, and I saw that the draw was down."

"Well?" prompted Luke, waiting impatiently, foot over the starter.

"And there was something—something uncanny about it—"

"About what? The draw being open?" with irony.

"No, no, no! There was—*somebody*—leaning over the side of it, looking down into the moat. I—I went over to speak to him—to *it*—and it raised its monstrous countenance and looked at me—and—my God, *it was the devil himself!*"

"Now, friend Cagliostro, you know as well as I that His Satanic Majesty isn't in the habit of strolling around in flesh and blood, the way you're telling me," reproved Luke, starting the car.

"Oh, don't go back! Don't! Turn around, I beg you! If you drive ahead, you'll meet—*it*—too!"

"I'm going to drive ahead, friend Binney. If you don't like it, get out now and walk. I have a mind to see your devil for myself. At least, the experience cannot fail to be stimulating," Luke grinned to himself.

"But his terrible eyes! His hideous smile! That bloated, misshapen nose! The purple face, like decomposing flesh! The twisted, frightful mouth! Good God, Mr. Porter, you don't know what a hideous *thing* you're going to confront! Turn back, while there is yet time! Turn—"

"Shut up!" snapped Luke. "A fine occultist you are, to let a mere ugly demon terrify you to such an extent!"

This dig was too much for the dignity of the occultist, who sank back in his seat in silence, evidently trying hard to regain something of his previous composure and impressiveness.

LUKE was obliged to go into low up the slope, which was not only very steep but covered with large rolling stones over which his car slipped and skidded unpleasantly. But when the summit of the rise had been reached, he was rewarded by an astonishing sight.

The moon was bright in an unclouded sky. Her light threw into high relief the battlements of what might have been an ancient medieval castle, while black shadows blocked out the approach to the great pile of massive granite blocks, so that the drawbridge of which the occultist had spoken remained in darkness. The headlights of the car fell upon this spot as Luke maneuvered the roadster for that purpose, disclosing a bridge across a moat at least ten feet wide. The bridge was solitary. No one stood there in the glare of the headlights. But just inside the portal of the draw a man waited, so impassively that he seemed a wax figure, arrayed in the ancient garb of an old-time page, with doublet and hose.

"Is that your devil?" Luke laughed.

Cagliostro drew a long breath of relief.

"No, that isn't the—*thing*—I saw. *That* was unutterably horrible. This is just a man, I imagine."

The car went closer. As it approached the draw, the page came out, holding up one hand in warning. His voice fell clearly, in quite good English, on the night air. He, at least, was flesh and blood.

"Don't drive over the bridge, sir, if you please. You will find the garage around at the side of the castle, to your right, sir. If you will be kind enough to put up your car and come back here on foot, I'll send a man to get your bags, sir."

"Evidently we're expected," Luke murmured to his companion. "I've half a mind to go in, friend Cagliostro."

"He thinks you are my assistant," whispered the occultist. His voice was under control now. "Are you—will you—?"

"Yes, I am, and I will," decided Luke, curiosity getting the better of him. "Send a man for our bags," he called to the servant, who bowed and disappeared within.

At the left of the castle there seemed to be no road, but the roadway at the right had been given a little attention; ruts had been smoothed out, stones removed. Halfway down beside the castle moat, a large granite garage loomed up. Luke drove the roadster into it, and a minute later two men, also arrayed in medieval costume, appeared and picked up his bags. Painting paraphernalia he left in the car.

"Where are your bags, friend Cagliostro?" he inquired.

The occultist shifted the pale blue eyes uneasily from Luke's amused gray orbs.

"I—ah—left them in front of the draw," he admitted.

"When you—oh, excuse me—I understand," grinned Luke, as he followed the servants back to the draw.

The thing that the artist did not like was that as they entered the courtyard within those lofty stone walls, a creaking sound announced that the drawbridge was being raised. A quick look behind him confirmed this suspicion. He and Cagliostro Moderno were now cut off from the outside world as completely as if they had been immured in a jail, in solitary confinement; those high walls meant no escape; that wide moat might not be deep enough for a plunge from the battlements.

Luke was suddenly glad to remember that in one of his bags was an automatic.

"If you have no objection, sir," one of the men asked Luke, much to the occultist's discomfiture taking the artist for the principal of the two, "the Master would like to have you wait for ten minutes on the roof garden, until your rooms are made ready. He cannot see you tonight, as he is occupied with an important experiment."

"We will await his pleasure," hastily exclaimed the occultist, assuming the lead with dignity.

He had once more swung his mantle about his plump form, and was permitting only the button nose and squinting eyes to appear above one edge of it.

Luke shrugged indifferent shoulders, as he followed the page up a winding staircase in a tower that rose on one side of the courtyard. They emerged upon what seemed to be a kind of roof garden, located on the broad top of one of the side walls of the castle, and wide enough to cover not only the wall but part of that portion of the building. Here the servitor paused, hesitated, then turned directly to Luke.

"The Master has directed me, sir, to ask that you pace back and forth along this central path, until I can come for you a little later."

Luke stared, a quirk of amusement twisting his mobile lips.

"Is that a suggestion, or a command?" he inquired pleasantly.

"Oh, sir, the Master always has a good reason back of the most absurd—that is, apparently absurd—requests," the man amended hastily.

"How about *me?*" bristled the occultist. "Perhaps he means that it is *I* who am to walk back and forth? It is *I* who am the—"

"Pardon me, sir, but it is the younger man to whom the Master's request is directed," the page said respectfully.

Cagliostro retired, slightly peevish, to seat himself on a rustic bench at one side of the narrow path. Luke, with much inward curiosity and amusement, strode back and forth along the pebbled way. The page disappeared. Luke, passing the doorway as he walked, suddenly stopped short, his head jerking to instant attention without turning it in the direction of what he heard. It was a voice; a husky, pleading woman's voice, whispering tensely.

"Don't turn your head! Pretend to be looking at the moon! But if you are a gentleman, don't leave this place without seeing Alden first! *Alden.* For God's sake, don't fail me! Look! The light—from the Master's tower! I must go, or he will see me here. At 4 in the morning—on this roof garden is the safest place!"

The voice ceased. There was the slightest rustle, as of a woman's garments. And then a blinding ray of light shot across the garden, disclosing everything as brightly as in broad daylight. Startled out of his astonishment at that mysterious and appealing feminine voice, Luke sprang out of the path of the ray, only to find it following him persistently as he walked.

"Lord! What's that?" gasped Cagliostro, jumping to his feet.

"Somebody's turning a searchlight on us," the artist decided, as he stopped to peer past the light. But it was too blinding.

"I think I understand," gabbled the occultist, the pale eyes thrust up into Luke's perplexed face. "It's *him.* Taking a look at me," proudly. "He asked you to walk, so that he could tell which of us was which." After this reflection, he hurried to seat himself again on the rustic bench, posing importantly.

"Darned impudent of Mr. Fane," Luke decided. "Must be an eccentric of the first water." He deliberately turned his back to the searchlight, which played about the garden, then back to him, almost as if suggesting that he walk again. But he stood deliberately still.

WITHIN five minutes the page appeared in the doorway and indicated that the two were to follow him. Winding passages gave place to steep and narrow staircases, dimly lighted by scattered candles guttering against dark walls; stairways led to corridors across which tiny slits in the stone of the outer walls threw occasional threads of faint moonlight. At last the servant threw open the door of a room, motioned Cagliostro to enter, left him standing there with a vaguely disturbed expression on his face, and led Luke to another room around a turn in the same corridor.

"If there is anything you'd like, sir, just ring for me—the electric button is here. My name is Mason, by the way, sir. It is the Master's desire that you drink a goblet of hot wine, sir, after your cold drive. I will bring it presently." He threw open a door at one side of the great apartment, disclosing a luxuriously appointed private bath. "I think you will be very comfortable, sir."

Luke looked about him, observing the tapestry-hung walls, the thickly carpeted floor, the over-stuffed arm-

chairs, the immense antique bed. He nodded appreciatively.

"I think I shall," he agreed. "Thank your master for the hot wine," he added. "It will be doubly welcome."

Mason bowed and disappeared. Urged by he knew not what motive, but with the feeling that he would like to be secured against intrusion in this strange place, the artist made a hasty examination of the room, lifting tapestries to peer behind them for hidden doors, and pulling up the bigger rugs for trap-doors. He grinned as he did so, feeling his actions absurd. But the absurdity of it did not keep him from making a thorough examination of his surroundings. The conclusion he arrived at was that he was secure from intrusion from the bathroom, but that any of those blocks of granite forming the walls might be in reality secret doors. Anything, he felt, would be possible, plausible, in this strange castle.

His thoughts ran to the voice of that unseen woman, who had asked him to meet her in the roof garden at 4 that morning. Was it a man or a woman whom he was to meet? A man—Alden?

Luke prepared for the night by slipping on a dressing gown and slippers, to blind Mason. When the man appeared with the steaming goblet of wine, he was told to leave it on the stand by the bed.

"I'll drink it a little later," the artist said casually. "Spiced rather heavily, isn't it?"

"It makes a good nightcap, sir," Mason remarked, a rather odd expression passing over his face. This unguarded look was not lost on Luke, who inwardly decided not to drink the wine, although it smelled enticing.

"I understand from Mr.—ah—Moderno, sir, that you've both dined? Is there anything else I can do for you, sir? No, sir? Thank you, sir."

Mason retired, closing the heavy door behind him. Luke at once went across the room, found a massive key, and turned it in the great hand-hammered bronze lock. That door, at least, should be impassable. . . .

Then from his bag he took an electric torch and his automatic, slipping them into different pockets of his coat, which he now reassumed. The spicy odor of the steaming wine penetrated to every corner of the room, affecting Luke soporifically. He picked up the goblet, carried it into the bathroom, and emptied it. He could not afford to sleep this first night in Fanewold.

CHAPTER 3

BEHIND THE ARRAS

Despite his intention to remain awake, the artist caught himself on the point of dozing more than once as the night wore on. When a light tap sounded on his door, then he was sure for a moment that he had only imagined it, and looked at his watch with the electric torch, not wishing to turn on even the shaded electric night-lamp. It was half-past 1 o'clock, and the rap on his door was no dream, for it came again, timidly, yet persistently.

Luke crossed the room and listened. Again the tap. With one hand in his pocket where the automatic lay, he unlocked the door and very quietly swung it ajar. A dark figure stood in the flickering light of the corridor candles, which contrasted oddly with the luxurious appointments, electric and otherwise, of his apartment. As he opened the door cautiously, this figure moved toward him with a slight rustle of starched garments. It was a woman who came in at the door, pushing it shut behind her. Luke touched the electric button; the room was flooded with light.

She stood without shrinking, her eyes narrowed at the sudden blaze of

illumination, an elderly woman with faded blue eyes, fine features that must once have been very lovely but were now lined heavily with the wrinkles of secret anxieties and apprehensions. Her dress was simple, dark, nondescript, but her apron and the cap resting on her straightly-drawn gray hair were snowy and starched, modern to the last extreme. Evidently an upper servant.

"You are the unmarried young man?" she whispered, one finger warning him to keep his voice low.

Luke nodded, smooth brow contracted, gray eyes darkening with puzzlement.

"I am Alden," the woman continued, still in that low, half-frightened manner. "Miss Fane's nurse. That is, I *was* her nurse; I have been her personal maid for some years, since she grew up from the baby I first cared for."

"Who is Miss Fane?"

"She is the adopted daughter of Madam Fane, Mr. Porter. It is about her that I have come to you, risking God only knows how much, to get your help for her sake. If the Master discovers that I have been to you, he will dispose of me—somehow," she said darkly. "At any rate, he would see to it that I could not help my little Sybil in this moment of dire need. Mr. Porter,"—she laid her worn hand on Luke's arm appealingly—"do not trust Guy Fane. He is a monster who will stop at nothing to gain his own ends." She shuddered convincingly.

"Still I do not understand," Luke said gently.

"Guy Fane is planning some monumental crime against Sybil," the woman whispered tensely. "Just what it is I can only surmise, but my barest imaginings of it are so horrible that I dare not put them into words. It is against her immortal soul that he is plotting, Mr. Porter. What use he wishes to make of an innocent girl, I cannot—dare not—think. But she must be saved—she *must!*"

"If there is anything I can do," Luke began, vaguely—when Alden seized his arm convulsively between her nervous, working fingers.

"Listen!" She remained in apprehensive silence for a long moment. Then she drew Luke toward the inner wall of his room.

"Lock your door. Now please follow me, in absolute silence. I am going to take you through a secret passage into Miss Fane's room, and hide you behind the tapestry so that you can understand something." Her finger went to her lips again in warning. She took a pocket flash from her apron and turned it on. Lifting one heavy hanging, she motioned Luke to follow. He did so, feeling as if he were in a strange dream. She pushed something somewhere in the wall. A part of what had seemed solid stone swung slowly away on a central pivot. Into the opening thus discovered she stepped, with beckoning finger. The artist walked behind her closely. Through a short passage, and then she once more hunted for and found some secret spring, which swung back a smaller stone like a window. Again that warning for silence. Then she took Luke's hand in hers, pushed it through the window, until he touched a swinging, heavy material, which he realized was a tapestry hanging similar to those in his own room. As he made the discovery, he heard voices again, and strained against the small opening to hear them better, at a gesture from the woman, who then shut off the flashlight.

THROUGH the chinks in the woven stuff came glints of light. Luke was impatient now to see, and as if she had divined his wish, Alden whispered cautiously that if he had a penknife he might be able to cut out a small piece of the tapestry. The

artist took the suggestion, and after a minute's awkward attempt, succeeded, and his eye went to the small opening.

He was looking into a charming boudoir, furnished in modern French fashion with pale blues and pinks, and lighted by a brilliant chandelier of crystal drops. On a bed opposite, a girl was sleeping deeply, a girl whose fair blond loveliness stirred the artist's soul and made his fingers itch to depict her on canvas. On either side of the sleeper's bed stood a figure, and either was ominous to a terrifying degree. One was short, squat, ungainly; draped from head to foot in swathing folds of somber black so thick as to conceal effectually whatever was beneath them. Not even the face of this individual showed under double thicknesses of black chiffon that left only the flashing of dark eyes to be glimpsed occasionally.

"She sleeps!" came from the thick folds of the veil, in a voice singularly rich and melodious. "Yet for a moment I thought she was only feigning sleep. My fearful imagination! But she sleeps soundly; the opiate never fails to do its work."

The second being—a woman, tall, black-garbed—bent over the sleeping girl.

Snow-white hair was piled above a face of singular but repelling pride and much devastated beauty; mingled in that speaking countenance were the traces of battling emotions that must have been going on in her soul for years, to have altered her face so terribly. Now across it writhed in sequence fury and reluctance; hate, and a kind of disdainful pity.

The man had been watching her attentively, for his voice issued now from the swathing folds of black.

"My dear mother, is it possible that you are considering withdrawal at this late moment? Now, when all lies ready to my hand? When the final act of this stupendous drama is ready to be played out? When—*He*—has promised to grant my prayers? Impossible!"

"I cannot look upon so much innocence and purity without experiencing something of remorse at the part I must play," cried the dark woman. "I am not withdrawing, Guy. But—she is so beautiful—so unsuspecting—so—"

"Oh, yes, I grant you all this, my dear mother. It is very tender and womanlike for you to feel such sympathy for her. But what about *me?*" terribly. "Do you not owe me some reparation for what you have done to me? I, who am what your deliberate desire for revenge upon a husband's infidelities made me—a thing so utterly horrible that I dare not look at my hideous mockery of a face lest I perish at my own temerity, my flesh creeping at the revolting and grisly monster that would confront me in my mirror?"

"Enough, Guy! Enough!" The mother wrung her attenuated hands.

"Oh, your revenge upon my father was complete, my dear mother! Yet the worst part of it fell upon me, who was innocent of any wrong. My forbidding deformities have served your purpose. Now you must expiate your crime against *me*. You must *pay*, mother. *You must pay.*"

She pressed both hands to her wrinkled cheeks.

"I never dreamed what it would mean to *you*," she pleaded. "Forgive—"

"Forgive you? Perhaps I may find it in my heart, if there is a human heart within this unsightly, monstrous mass of flesh, to forgive you when the final act of the drama has been played out. Oh, when I have gained the grace and comeliness of which your revengeful hate robbed me, perhaps I may forgive you, *then!*"

She held her outstretched hands toward him pleadingly.

"Have I rebelled, Guy? Have I not put myself utterly in your hands, even to the extent of endangering my immortal soul?" wailed she, as if in agony.

"*Your* soul endangered, my dear mother?" The man laughed a short, sneering laugh. "You should have considered your soul—and mine, dear mother, *mine*—long ago, when you prepared Lucifer's chapel, and frequented it during those months before my hateful birth, thinking only of your unspeakable revenge upon my father. You had your wish; you drove him away in horror at the sight of the monstrous prodigy that would be his heir. Now, *I* must have *my* wish. It is only to undo what you did, sweet mother," in mocking tones.

"I sometimes wonder if a demon inhabits your frame, Guy—"

The squat individual chuckled horribly.

"Perhaps it is so, dear mother. Who can tell? But my wish is *so* modest. I only ask that the exquisite loveliness reposing on this couch deliver up to me some of its charm. And with generosity, I am willing—anxious—to give all, all my own ugliness, all my forbidding deformity, in exchange!"

"But you told me you would use the man," hesitated the woman.

The short figure gave a shrug of its shoulders.

"I tried to see him in the searchlight, but I couldn't tell whether or not he had the physique, the features, that would interest me more than these," motioning toward the girl. "It is the more subtle way, to take them from him, and wreck her soul — afterward," he observed thoughtfully. "Well, tomorrow I must see him and decide."

"Guy, spare her soul! Let it be a stranger! Not this poor child! I tell you, I am afraid! She is too pure, too innocent. The very stars in their courses will fight for her."

"And is not her purity, her innocence, what make her more acceptable to *Him*? Ah," and he lifted black-swathed arms above the sleeping girl in terrible invocation, "Lucifer, Son of the Morning! Only Thou canst understand how great is my impatience at the delay of these last preparations that will make the sacrifice acceptable unto Thee! I tell you, mother, not until this girl sees her purity and loveliness turning into ugliness, her innocence of thought replaced by the lowest, vilest passions that can enter the human mind, not until then will Lucifer exult in the sacrifice."

"There you err, wretched boy!" cried out the mother passionately. "Her beauty may pass, but her soul is in a higher keeping."

"I have made no mistakes, my mother. Her soul will yet be Lucifer's. He who has been instructed by a prince of the fallen hosts of heaven cannot err."

"But don't you see that because He is a prince of darkness He has failed to take into His calculations the power of light? Guy, Guy, beware of putting overmuch trust in Lucifer. He only seeks to draw down to Himself, not to exalt. It is your mother, your wretched mother, who warns you. Your mother, who has paid ten thousand times in agony and tears for her crime against her unborn son!"

The veiled figure made the travesty of a cross by folding its arms and resting its hands upon its own shoulders. Then the head bent upon the folded arms, while a mocking, ironical laugh issued softly from the folds of the veil.

"You don't believe yet, do you, mother? Well, you *shall!* In spite of what you have already experienced, what you have seen with your own eyes, you remain incredulous? You persist in your skepticism? Oh!" he cried out with strange passion;

"do not *dare* tell me that you do not believe! Your words unnerve me. . . . I almost feel as if there were some powerful influence near this sleeping girl, some influence mutely but strongly battling against me! To the chapel! To the chapel!"

He moved rapidly to the woman's side and urged her toward the door.

"Not tonight, Guy. I cannot bear it again—so soon. I am not a young woman. You are fearless, but I am unutterably afraid! Not tonight, I implore you!"

"To the chapel!" cried the man's mellifluous voice, inexorably. "I will sacrifice a pair of doves—or a young lamb. You *must* be convinced, or you cannot help me, and—*I must not fail.* I would rather die than fail!"

The reluctant woman moved slowly toward the door, followed by the squat figure of the strange being in its black wrappings.

The door of Sybil Fane's room swung to behind those ill-omened figures. As it closed, Alden's hand plucked nervously at Luke Porter's sleeve.

"Mr. Porter, we must get back to your room at once. You are supposed to be asleep, and if the Master should happen to visit your room—" she left the sentence unfinished.

"You go ahead. You know the way," whispered Luke, irritated at the inference unspoken.

He wanted to take one last look at the sleeping beauty in the great antique bed, but the light in the room had been extinguished and there only remained to follow Alden back through the narrow winding of the secret passage. Back in his room, Alden let the tapestry drop over the hidden door and turned to the young man, heavy eyes burning in her wrinkled face.

"I cannot tell the whole story now," she said hurriedly. "If you promise you will not leave here without making an attempt to rescue Sybil, I will try to see you before too many days have passed, and then I will tell you the secrets that I have learned, and the secret that I know, *I only.*"

"That girl is certainly in bad hands, judging from the conversation we have just overheard," Luke decided. "Alden, I'm with you. If she needs me, I am at Miss Fane's service."

"She doesn't know, yet, what danger she is in," Alden pointed out. "So far, she has had the kindest treatment, and has been indulged in every way, except that she has been told she cannot leave the castle until after she is married."

"Then she has never been outside these walls?" asked the artist, astonished.

"She has read about the world, in carefully censored books, but she has been taught that a girl does not emerge from such seclusion as this until she marries. And—there is yet another thing."

"Well?" prompted Luke.

"Mr. Porter, she believes that any day her future husband may appear in Fanewold. She is ready to fall in love with the first good-looking man who comes here. Why that should please the Master I do not know, but I am sure that he intends you to be Sybil's suitor."

"It might be worse," murmured Luke, thinking of the flowerlike loveliness of that sleeping beauty. "Well, Alden, cheer up. When I get a better understanding of the situation, you may rely upon me to do my best for Miss Fane. She is too charming a girl to be left to the tender mercies of such a man as this Guy Fane seems to be, judging from what I've heard tonight."

"Sometime you will know how deeply I appreciate your kindness, Mr. Porter. Sometime, when you know my secret," murmured the

woman. "Until then, I beg one thing only: *Do not trust the Master.*"

She unlocked the hall door, listened for a moment, then opened it quietly and slipped out into the light of the flickering candles.

CHAPTER 4

THE MASTER

FROM the deep slumber into which his vigils finally plunged him, Luke wakened to hear someone rapping loudly at the door. He got up lazily and unlocked it.

"If you please, sir, the Master has ordered breakfast for you and the other gentleman on the roof garden. The morning is mild and warm, sir. Of course," and the voice altered subtly, "if you *prefer* to breakfast in bed, I am sure the Master will alter his arrangements."

"Let it be the roof garden, Mason," Luke acquiesced. "I'll be out in ten minutes. Is Mr. Binney—that is, the other gentleman—up?"

"He is already out, sir. A light sleeper, sir, I'd say. Didn't touch the spiced wine, sir," irrelevantly.

"You may as well take out my empty goblet," Luke suggested, "now you're here. That's some wine, Mason. But it makes a fellow sleep," he said casually. Under his heavy eyebrows the keen gray eyes watched Mason's face.

"You may well say so, sir. Miss Sybil always sleeps heavily after drinking it. The Master gives it to her whenever she complains of insomnia."

Mason appeared innocent enough, but Luke fancied that the man was studying him curiously behind that impassive gaze.

"May I give you a hand, sir, with your dressing?"

"Thanks, no. Not used to being valeted, Mason. I'll be upstairs in a few minutes," dismissed Luke.

"Wanted to drug me last night," he murmured to himself. "I'll have to watch out for these quieting nightcaps," he told himself as he dressed, but his thoughts were more on the mystifying remarks he had heard the night before, hidden behind the tapestry of Sybil Fane's room.

He was anxious to meet the girl, and wondered if she would appear at breakfast. There was no one in the garden but the occultist, however, and the little man was pacing nervously up and down the path when Luke appeared at the doorway.

"This is a strange place!" was his greeting. "Did—did you sleep last night?"

"Like a top," Luke replied carelessly.

Cagliostro jerked his carroty head from one side to the other and after his squinty eyes had gazed watchfully about him, he said in a low voice:

"Well, I suppose you drank that wine, didn't you?"

Luke laughed.

"No, my good Cagliostro, I didn't. What do you take me for? A babe in arms? I poured it down the lavatory in the bathroom, and sat up for hours to find out why I'd been offered the potion."

"Then you knew about it?" babbled the occultist, marveling. "How did you know?"

"How did *you?*" parried Luke, smiling. "By the way, I see our breakfast is ready, and it looks mighty appetizing."

He drew up a chair and would have seated himself so that he was facing the forest, but Mason hastily interfered, pulling out a chair that seated him facing the interior towers of the castle. Slightly puzzled, Luke took the place. As he helped himself to crisp bacon and golden marmalade, his watchful eyes went over the towers that he faced. Within the castle walls there rose a great roof of

corrugated glass, admitting sunlight but shutting out all intrusive glances. This translucent roof was built in a series of terraces culminating in a central tower at one end, which style of architecture permitted the insertion of ventilators in the shape of metal blinds set with the openings downward, again with the very obvious end of shielding the courtyard from curious eyes while at the same time affording free access of fresh air.

"That's an odd sort of thing," he started to say to his companion, when he was suddenly half blinded by a brilliant flash of light from the tower above the glass roof, a flash so sharp and sudden that he flung up one hand to protect his eyes. It was as if some mischievous urchin had manipulated a mirror to deflect the sun's rays into his face. When he looked to see what had occasioned the flash, his curiosity was piqued, and at the same time he was slightly irritated. It was a repetition of last night's occurrence with the searchlight. The flash had been occasioned by the reflection of sunlight from glass, but the glass had not been a mirror; it was from the barrels of a field-glass in the act of being once more leveled in his direction. Some curious individual was looking him over in this manner.

"Darned impertinence," Luke said aloud. "Cagliostro, what would you take that to be?" He pointed out the two barrels of the field-glass which he could observe distinctly between the shutters of a window in the central tower.

The occultist looked back across his shoulders without much interest, obviously preoccupied with his own thoughts.

"Somebody is looking us over, my friend. He didn't get a very good look at us last night, so he's trying it in daylight. And I know who it is," Luke added in a low voice.

The pale blue eyes shifted to look into Luke's. Somewhere in their depths flickered a keener perception than the artist had supposed the little Binney capable of.

"It's—he," whispered the occultist.

"How do you know?"

"I feel it, Mr. Porter."

"Well, I know, because—" and then Luke broke off, remembering that the information he had gained by listening behind the hangings in Sybil Fane's room was not to be imparted in this fashion.

"Did you feel it, too?"

"Why, yes, that is about what I'd think," Luke stumbled awkwardly.

"We are supposed to meet Mr. Fane this morning," the occultist volunteered, as he finished his second cup of coffee with gusto.

"Mr. Fane wishes Mr. Porter to go up to his study first," said Mason's suave voice over Luke's shoulder.

Cagliostro bristled with indignation. His pouting mouth stuck its lips out in protest.

"There's some mistake," he scolded, peevishly. "This young man is merely my—my assistant. *I* am the occultist, not he."

The major-domo did not smile. He spoke seriously and respectfully.

"Quite so, sir. But Mr. Fane undoubtedly wishes to see if your assistant is satisfactory, before bothering you with an interview. He would not care to take up your time needlessly, I'm sure, sir."

The occultist was satisfied. He seated himself, wrapped in his dark mantle, upon the rustic bench, with immense dignity.

"I will wait here, until you return, Mr. Porter," he announced.

"Will you kindly come with me, sir?" Mason requested. "The Master has asked me to tell you that he hopes you will make allowance for him, if you find him irritable. He is tired and nervous from a sleepless night."

WITHOUT giving the artist time to reply, Mason led the way down long corridors and staircases, that led, Luke surmised by the general direction, into the very heart of Fanewold Castle. At last they paused before a door; Mason opened it noiselessly, stepping to one side and motioning the artist to enter. No announcement was made; indeed, as the room was in complete darkness, Luke could hardly believe that anyone was waiting there.

He stepped across the threshold of the room slowly and paused, hardly knowing whether to stop where he was or to feel his way forward through the Stygian darkness. The outer corridor had been dimly illuminated by occasional tall and narrow windows, shadowed by climbing ivy, but this room apparently had no windows, and the only light was that of a single candle standing so far back in the depths of the apartment that it served but to make the darkness visible.

Luke took another step forward. He stood stock-still and waited. He had no intention of breaking a rib by a fall over unseen pieces of antique furniture. He had half a mind to step back out of that uncanny blackness that seemed to be closing in like innumerable invisible presences, alive with inconceivable and strange malevolence. As he stood, half exasperated and half unnerved by the oddity of his bizarre reception, a voice sounded on his ear, so unexpectedly near at hand that the startled young man went back several paces.

The soft and musical notes of that plaintive voice did not move Luke from his quick indignation, and although the first words spoken were in apology, the artist gulped hard to swallow his resentment at those tricks of darkness and an unseen speaker. Memory of the previous night's revelations also angered him.

"Pardon me, my dear sir, I beg of you, for what must seem a strange and inhospitable reception," said the voice. "I am, alas, inflicted with a malady which precludes your reception in other than the dim light of this room. My eyes," went on that melancholy and touching voice plaintively, "cannot bear more than the pale light of a single candle at a distance."

"Such a reception is hardly reassuring," Luke remarked coldly, his nerves yet throbbing. "But since you have been so kind as to explain that it is due to a misfortune, I can not of course do other than extend sympathy for a malady which shuts you away from the glorious light of day. I am speaking, I presume, to Mr. Guy Fane?"

"I am Guy Fane. Your name, I am informed, is Luke Porter? If you will step forward, Mr. Porter, your hand will find a chair already placed. I would like to ask a few questions of you, if you do not object."

Luke found the indicated chair and sat down uncomfortably. This conversation with an unseen person in the dark was not just to his taste; he loved sunshine and space, not this black, crowding darkness.

"I understand that you have come with—ah—Cagliostro Moderno, as his assistant? Have you ever studied—ah—magic?"

Luke consulted himself hastily. He dared not deny knowledge of the subject entirely, for this might result in his being shut out completely from the strange experiments he was now burning to witness. Moreover, he did not wish to leave Fanewold without first meeting Sybil Fane, and seeing how he could be of service to her if she really needed, as Alden had declared, his help.

"I have not gone very deeply into the subject, Mr. Fane," he admitted with apparent frankness. "But you must know that it is too tremendous

in scope for anyone to say that he has done more than—studied—it."

"Then it is our Cagliostro who is the real adept, the initiate?"

A laugh followed the words; a laugh so eery that Luke had much ado to keep his nerves from throbbing uncomfortably again. The cachinnation broke off as suddenly as it had burst forth, leaving in its wake a silence yet more uncanny. Luke felt that through the gloom the unseen Master was gazing at him with keen eyes that pierced the darkness and was cynically enjoying his manifest discomfort. He took himself in hand firmly.

Guy Fane spoke suddenly then, taking up the current of his thought as if he had not broken it off by his uncanny laughter.

"He really doesn't look the part, do you think, Mr. Porter?"

"One doesn't have to look the part, does he, to accomplish what he sets out to do? I don't wear flowing ties and long hair, but I've managed to achieve a small success at painting, and I don't look the part, I've been told often," Luke retorted.

"You are not slow at a parry, Mr. Porter," complimented the invisible host. "What I wish to know is: do you feel skeptical about magic, or have you reason to believe that it exists?"

"I've seen black magic worked in Haiti," Luke said slowly. "After that, can I deny it?"

"Right to the point, aren't you? What does it represent to you?"

The reply came slowly, for Luke felt that Guy Fane laid much stress upon it. The whole affair savored so much of the *outré* that he felt extreme dislike to discuss such a subject under such conditions. Yet the very silence appeared to wait upon his answer.

"In its final analysis, magic is no more than the power of the imagination, utilized along lines with which the masses are not conversant. The imagination possesses potentialities fraught with more far-reaching influence and potent force than is realized by the average man," he said at last.

"Ah! Your opinion interests me immensely. It coincides with mine. You would concede, then, that under conditions where the human mind has been wrought up to a high tension, incidents ordinarily termed miraculous might take place?"

"Admittedly."

"What would you consider the conditions most favorable for the working of so-called miracles?" asked the Master, eagerness discernible in his mellow voice.

"The Bible states plainly that the first condition is that of ardent demand. The second is that of earnest belief that the demand not only will be fulfilled, but is *already* fulfilled."

"Then you think results will be quicker and more powerful in proportion to the strength of the faith involved?"

"Assuredly, Mr. Fane."

"I am much gratified to find that we are so deeply in accord on such an interesting subject, Mr. Porter. I am conducting an experiment along magical lines, and shall later on expect some very important assistance from you. My good mother cannot assist me as much as she used to; growing ill-health makes it impossible for her to concentrate mentally."

Luke remained silent. There was a short pause.

"In the meantime, may I ask you to do what you can to make the hours pass agreeably for my cousin? I shall consider as a personal favor all that you do for her. In fact, you will be doing me a great service, which you may understand better, later on. Mason!"

The major-domo appeared in the dim entrance.

"Will you kindly take Mr. Porter to Miss Fane? And bring me the—ah—adept, who must have been waiting impatiently for this pleasant little chat with Mr. Porter to end."

Luke followed the servitor into the corridor, as Guy Fane's velvety voice sank musically into the darkness and died away. But after he had taken the few steps which would bring him to comparative light, he paused, with a vivid impression that something stood before him, blocking his way and staring up at him with eyes that mocked subtly.

"How extremely psychic you are, my dear Mr. Porter," murmured Guy's voice, vibrating with gentle amusement. As he spoke, a soft rustle betrayed the movement of someone near at hand. The way was clear.

Luke followed Mason down the corridor, beneath the light of the guttering candles. As he went, he heard that strange laugh again, full now of what seemed to his sensitive ear malicious enjoyment. The sound of it struck an angry chill through him. As he groped along, he continued to feel strange, peering eyes following his slow progress, and the sensation did not serve in any way to retard his steps.

CHAPTER 5

SYBIL

CONDUCTED by Mason, Luke found himself back in the roof garden after the usual traverse of twisting, winding corridors. The impatient Cagliostro arose immediately, anxious for his own interview with the Master, but on his way out stopped to whisper in Luke's ear:

"Well, is he satisfied? What did he ask you? What did you say to him?"

Luke's lips twitched with amusement. His gray eyes danced.

"Friend Cagliostro, I was asked if I believed in magic, and I said I did."

The occultist's pale blue eyes stared incredulously at him.

"Well, you're rather surprizing, Mr. Porter. I had no idea that you were far enough along on the road to believe in the tremendous underlying powers and forces which the average individual doesn't even suspect, let alone believe in. Well, well, well!"

Down the corridor behind the retreating Mason, Luke could hear that astonished echo, of "Well, well, well!" as Cagliostro went to his interview.

The breakfast table had been removed. A gaily red *vis-à-vis* swing had been stood up in its place, as if in preparation for someone. Luke dropped into one side of it and began mulling over his experiences of the past night and that morning, swinging back and forth as he thought.

That Guy Fane was a monomaniac on the subject of black magic he could see readily. What he disliked was the implication that the innocent Sybil Fane was to be involved to her own injury in some of Guy Fane's villainous or criminal practises. Moreover, Luke himself was also being drawn into them, if he was to believe the hints contained in the words of the Master the night before. Just how he could be useful to the black magician, he could not imagine, and he wondered how much of his knowledge on the subject could safely be imparted to Cagliostro Moderno, whose ingenuous nature he had sensed even at their first meeting. Luke did not believe that the little Herbert Binney cared to be drawn into such vile practises as Guy Fane would be guilty of. To a certain extent, then, Herbert Binney might be trusted, and if his knowledge of black magic was more than merely theoretical, perhaps he would understand why Guy Fane imagined he could rob another man of fine physique, handsome features, for his own vicious purposes.

Sunken in his puzzled thoughts, Luke did not see a slender, girlish figure that tripped from the doorway across the garden path toward him and came to a stop before the swing. Then he looked up, startled for a moment. Sybil's blond hair had been cut in a modern bob, but with its fluffy curls it made a soft frame about her face. She lifted her eyes to him, and the artist almost cried out with exultation, so beautiful was their purple-pansy velvetiness. The play of alert and arch intelligence lightened the lovely face that he had seen the night before in soft repose. Only one defect, if defect it was, made Sybil's eyes seem deep with mystery; the eyebrows that outlined them above were much darker than her hair, making her eyes and her crimson lips stand out with startling prominence on her pale skin.

The artist sprang to his feet.

"Miss Fane?"

The girl put out both hands in such friendly fashion that Luke dropped formality at once. Her charm, her poise, her absolute ingenuousness, made their impression upon the man as well as upon the artist. He took the slender hands in his. They stood for a minute in silence, looking at each other with interested eyes. Then Sybil spoke in a soft, repressed little voice with a nervous undertone trembling through it.

"Are you—are you—*my lover?*"

The artist remained silent for an astonished moment, his mobile lips parting slightly with the shock of her words. Some movement in the doorway drew his eyes; the gray-haired Alden was standing there, duenna-like, one finger ever so slightly uplifted as if in warning. He remembered her words of the previous night. . . .

"May I be your—lover?" he said quickly.

She nodded with sweet simplicity, honest purple eyes still upon him. Her hands clung with a soft pressure that stirred his heart strangely; he swore to himself that no harm should touch this innocent, ingenuous girl, if he could foresee and prevent it.

"Let us sit on the parapet," proposed Sybil, gayly, drawing him to the garden wall, which overhung the black moat. "There are so many things I want to ask you. And I am so glad you are handsome, dear lover. I have always been afraid you wouldn't look the way I wished."

"And I do?" smiled Luke, letting himself fall in with the mood of the girl, as one humors an innocent child.

"Oh, I love your gray eyes!" she said honestly. "And your teeth are so nice when you smile. And you have a kind of air. . . . You see, lover, I've never yet seen any man but the servants here. My cousin Guy never lets anyone see him, because he has weak eyes, poor dear, and cannot come out in the sun. And you are so different from Mason and the other men."

"I should hope so!" was Luke's fervent, though unspoken, comment.

Mrs. Alden advanced from the doorway. Sybil turned toward her old nurse with a welcoming smile.

"Oh, Alden dear, isn't my lover beautiful?"

The ardent admiration in her voice brought color to the artist's tanned cheeks, but he met the unsmiling gaze of Alden with frank sincerity.

"Isn't Sybil the loveliest thing the world has ever seen?" he asked of no one in particular, but his voice vibrated with an emotion that Alden noted, if the girl did not.

The older woman stood near the two as they sat on the parapet; she looked down into the moat below. Luke, still holding the girl's slender hands in his, artist eyes feasting upon her blond loveliness, enhanced by the crude embroideries on the white woolen sports frock, did not realize at

first what Alden was saying. Then, when she repeated her words, he gave them alert attention, realizing that she spoke with a hidden meaning.

"Nobody could hope to swim unhurt through that black water," she was saying significantly. "Ten feet wide, and eight feet deep, is that sluggish water, Mr. Porter. And—look!"

She leaned across the parapet, pointing urgently at something whitish that floated in the turbid water. As Luke leaned over to look, there was the movement of some long, slimy thing below, and the whitish article went whirling in the eddies caused by the abrupt movement of that water-snake. It was the body of a dove. The poor thing's plumage was soiled with viscid green and darker stains that might have been dried blood.

Luke's eyes went to Alden's in mute inquiry. The woman shook her head, as if she either could not, or would not, explain. Sybil, however, was not so backward.

"You're wondering about that poor dove?" she asked softly. "Oh, that is one thing I don't like! I don't, indeed! I've told my cousin Guy hundreds of times that I just couldn't bear it to have my doves killed for sacrifices, no matter how great the cause." Her voice trembled slightly, and Luke saw that the pansy eyes were moist. "But he is above worrying over the life of a dove, when he is seeking wonderful things that are so much more important."

There was a dreamy look now in the purple eyes. Alden looked at her charge, a tragic impotence on her wrinkled face.

"Now it is a dove," she said, not directly to Luke, but as if she were talking to herself. "The other day it was a young lamb. And it may some day be—another—lamb."

Luke felt cold chills traversing his spinal column. This black magician, then, was actually sacrificing lives to his devilish gods. Could it be possible that Sybil—and he himself—were already devoted to that devil worship? Luke told himself that in future he would not stir without the automatic in his pocket. The tenseness of his gray eyes did not escape Alden's observation; she sighed as if in relief.

"Don't let's talk about it," hastily interpolated Sybil, with a shudder. "I just can not get used to it. I've told cousin Guy many times that I'm sure the High Powers would appreciate fine fruits, or choice flowers, or incense, as well as a poor little dove's life."

"Shall we talk about painting you, Sybil?" suggested Luke, the artist in him gaining the mastery.

She clapped her hands gayly.

"That would be fun, lover."

"Call me Luke, my dear. That is my name."

"Luke? How odd! But I like it. Where are your canvases and brushes and colors, Luke?"

Luke turned to Alden.

"I left the whole business in my car, outside in the garage. Can I manage to get outside the castle?"

A mysterious smile came over Alden's face.

"No, Mr. Porter, you can not."

"What?" exploded Luke.

Alden's finger went to her lips again.

"It would be better for you to ask Mason to send a man for your painting things," she suggested pointedly.

Reluctantly, Luke assented. He did not like the idea that he was virtually a prisoner in the castle, but in view of more important things he put that thought aside for the time being. Mason sent a page for the artist's paraphernalia; the easel was set up in the garden, and Sybil seated herself on the parapet, little pointed chin on drawn-up knees about which her arms were clasped in childish fashion. Luke, silent, prepared his palette and began to paint. In this manner the

(Continued on page 420)

THE TERRIFIC EXPERIMENT

by Hurley Von Ruck

THREE physicians, dyed-in-the-wool allopaths, were seated in the lounge of the Forest City Club enjoying an after-dinner smoke. Conversation had run the gamut of various and disputed cults, spiritualism, Christian Science, psychanalysis, and lastly hypnotism.

"Hypnotists have been proven fakers, every mother's son of them," asserted Hilliard, the younger of the trio; then continued: "Here comes Dr. Phil Roman. Psycho-therapy is his specialty, as you know. Suppose we ask for his views on hypnotism?"

Dr. Philip Roman, a tall, striking figure with flashing black eyes and snow-white hair, which contrasted noticeably with his unlined face, now approached the little group.

"Phil, what do you know of hypnotism?" queried Hilliard abruptly.

Dr. Roman put out his right hand as if to ward off a blow, and into his eyes a look came that none of the trio had ever seen there before. He seated himself and remained silent for several minutes, seeming to struggle with an emotion that mastered him for the moment.

Presently, however, he said: "Gentlemen, with your permission, I will relate a story as my answer to your question, 'What do you know of hypnotism?'

"After my graduation from medical college, I served an interneship in one of our New York hospitals, which contained an extensive psychopathic department. I became so interested in the different methods of treating cases of deranged mentality and disorders of the nervous system, that I resolved to specialize in that branch of medicine. Accordingly at the end of my year in the hospital I went to Paris, became a pupil of the eminent Dr. Paul Richard, who took a rather personal interest in me, giving me unusual opportunities of observing his methods and allowing me to be present at some of his experiments. As a hypnotist you know he stood unequaled, and I have seen him get results which bordered on the miraculous.

"I was an ardent admirer of his and tried in every way to deserve his favor, with the result that at the beginning of my second year under his instruction he called me one day after the clinic and said, 'Philip, together with a number of my colleagues, I am about to make an experiment in hypnotism which, up to the present time, has never been attempted. I want you to be present, also Maynard, who

will take notes. Meet me tomorrow evening at 8:30, No. 27 Rue ———.'

"You can fancy my surprize and delight. I rushed excitedly about in search of Maynard, that I might impart the wonderful news to him.

"Maynard, who roomed with me, knew how to keep his own counsel and had confided to me nothing of his history, nor did I ask any questions, although I always felt that there was some tragedy or sorrow in his past, but whatever it was it could have been nothing to his discredit, for he was at all times the soul of honor, and was so quiet and retiring in his manner that I affectionately dubbed him 'The Mouse'.

"Of course he was immensely pleased at my news, and in his quiet way as much thrilled as I was. We could hardly eat or sleep, and time never dragged as it did all the rest of that day and the next.

"AT LAST the hour of the rendezvous arrived and found us waiting a quarter of an hour too early at the door of 27 Rue ————. While we awaited the arrival of Dr. Richard and his associates we passed the time walking back and forth, studying the house which bore that number. It was a plain, three-story structure such as one may see in many streets about that neighborhood and was in no way distinctive in its outward appearance, yet as I looked at it, it seemed to assume a sinister aspect which ill accorded with the exuberance of my spirits.

"Finally, after what seemed hours to us, Dr. Richard appeared with four other men, and The Mouse and I were introduced to them and duly awed by their presence. Theirs were names we recognized as standing in the foremost ranks of the scientific world.

"Then we entered the house and proceeded up two flights of stairs, down an ill-lighted corridor to a room at the end of the passage. It was a large room, almost devoid of furniture, the only articles it contained being a long, couchlike chair, half chaise longue and half operating table, over which burned a light of extreme brilliancy, about seven or eight chairs of the straight-back variety and a pair of scales. Two windows which looked out upon an alleyway and a door leading to an adjoining apartment summed up the features of the room.

"'Gentlemen,' said Dr. Richard, addressing us as soon as we were gathered within its walls, 'I have asked you here to join me in attempting an unusual experiment of testing the effect of hypnotism upon the human body over an extended period of time. My subject is the notorious criminal, Jacques Voisin, who you all know has been condemned to death for the brutal murder of a little child. Through the influence of friends in high office I have obtained permission to use him in this experiment during the six weeks which intervene between this date and that set for his execution.

"'It is my wish to hold him in the hypnotic state during this period. Every precaution will be taken to prevent his escape, and a heavy guard will keep him constantly under surveillance. The house will be surrounded day and night and no one will be permitted to enter or depart without an order from the prefect of police. So much for that!

"'You are all familiar with the fact that in a state of trance the human body becomes lighter by several pounds, a phenomenon which has hitherto never been satisfactorily explained. We are convened here to study it, and we will endeavor to discover its cause by observing the results of a prolonged hypnotic sleep.

"'Something, some tangible thing, must temporarily leave the body. If, as I dare hope, we are able to cause our subject's body to become extremely light in weight, we may perhaps be

able to minimize the physical obstacles so that they will cease to interfere with our studies, and we shall be enabled to observe the liberation of this tangible element, discover its true nature, and prove whether or not consciousness is a matter of pounds.

" 'I believe this is possible, and I ask your earnest co-operation in what may solve the problem of the human race since man made his first appearance upon the earth. Furthermore, I must exact from each of you an oath that not one word of our project or its developments will pass your lips until such time as I may give you permission to speak.'

"He paused, and one by one we solemnly swore to keep inviolate the secrets of that room.

"When we had done so, Dr. Richard went to the door of which I spoke, unlocked it and beckoned to someone within.

"Almost immediately two gendarmes of enormous stature and apparent strength appeared, leading between them a man whose hands were manacled in front of him and whose feet were joined by a length of chain attached to anklets.

"He was not a large man and appeared rather slight. His features were unimpressive and somewhat commonplace, but his eyes were the strangest I ever saw, being of so pale and indefinable a color as to produce the impression that they were covered with a film of some sort.

"As I looked at him his expression was so mild it seemed to me incredible that he was the brute I knew him to be.

"DR. RICHARD motioned the gendarmes to lead the prisoner to the table, and when they had done so, the great hypnotist addressed his subject in the following words:

" 'Voisin, you are here by order from the prefecture of police to assist us in an experiment, the nature of which you would not understand and which you need not know. Your life is forfeit to the republic and the date of your execution set. Therefore your death is inevitable. Should it occur during our experiment, you will be spared the ignominy of the scaffold; on the other hand, should you survive, your execution will take place as decreed. But this I will tell you: in the event of our success you will have been the instrument in giving to the world one of the greatest discoveries, if not *the* greatest, ever recorded in the annals of scientific research. Now do you desire to be the subject of our experiment, or will you return to your cell and there await the hour of your execution?'

"As Dr. Richard was speaking, the strange eyes of Voisin turned from one to the other of us, and lingered longest, I recall, upon The Mouse, who stood slightly in the background.

"Dr. Richard paused for a reply and Voisin asked quietly, 'What are you going to do to me?'

"His voice was surprizingly rich, vibrant and melodious.

" 'You will not be made to suffer, Voisin,' replied Dr. Richard, 'and you will be given every care and attention, also you will be watched every instant of the day and night, and I warn you that any attempt at escape will be futile. All that you need to know is that you will be placed in a hypnotic state and kept there as long as we desire to continue our experiment. Do you consent or refuse?'

"It happened that as the doctor was speaking I kept my attention riveted upon Voisin, therefore I observed when the mention of hypnotic state was made that his eyes narrowed to mere slits and an indescribably cunning look appeared in their inscrutable depths. I noticed also a slight movement of the muscles of the jaw such as appears when a man sets his teeth and makes up his mind. Almost instantly, however, his fea-

tures resumed their former expression and he said:

" 'I consent, and am most anxious to assist in your noble project. I must thank you for the honor you have conferred upon me, and it is my hope that through me you may learn something which will astonish the world. I am ready, *messieurs.*'

"At this the gendarmes lifted him to the table, and after making fast the chain uniting his feet to padlocks in the footpiece of the chair, and his hands to chains attached to the sides, withdrew at a sign from Dr. Richard.

"I thought as I watched these preparations that it was an unnecessary piece of cruelty to inflict bonds upon a man who was to be held in a hypnotic trance, but I had such confidence in and profound respect for my chief that I immediately experienced a keen self-reproach at entertaining even a critical thought, and stood respectfully aside as the men of science grouped themselves around the prostrate form of their subject.

" 'Come into the circle, Philip,' said Dr. Richard, to my utter amazement and delight. 'I want you to assist us. You, Maynard, draw a chair into the light and record everything you see and hear. Now, gentlemen, I will make the passes and you will please concentrate every ounce of your mental suggestion upon the success of our experiment. Voisin, look at me, and do as I tell you.'

"He then passed his hand lightly over the subject's brow and gazed into his eyes. Every man's attention was concentrated upon the subject, who, however, showed no effect of the power directed upon him.

"Once more Dr. Richard passed his hand over Voisin's brow, extending the downward motion over the eyes. Presently the eyelids began to droop, and after a considerable time closed and the breathing became deeper and deeper.

"Again the passes, then Dr. Richard stepped back a pace and asked, 'Voisin, do you hear me speak?'

" 'I do.'

" 'Good,' said the doctor, and he reached down and deftly unfastened the locks which were attached to Voisin's fetters, leaving him unbound and free.

" 'Now, Voisin, you are bound hand and foot, you know you can not move and must remain as we have placed you until you are removed to your cell, but you will feel nothing and can trust us, so you will allow us to test your sensations by piercing your left cheek with this hat-pin. Open your mouth.'

"Thereupon he drew from the lapel of his coat a long hat-pin and forced it into the flesh and completely through the cheek. Its point protruded from the mucous membrane of the mouth.

"Voisin did not flinch, but lay with closed eyes. The doctor withdrew the pin and a little stream of blood followed its removal.

" 'Now, I shall pass it through your right cheek and you will feel no pain nor will you bleed.'

"And the pin was thrust through the right cheek, withdrawn, and no blood flowed.

" 'So far, so good,' remarked Dr. Richard with satisfaction. 'That area is completely anesthetized. Now I shall apply a lighted vesta to the sole of your foot. It will burn a hole in your sock, but will not blister your skin and you will feel no pain,' the doctor continued, as he removed Voisin's shoes, then proceeded to light a long wax vesta, the blaze of which he held to the sole of the foot.

"Almost instantly an odor of burning wool filled the room and a smoke arose from the spot touched by the flame. Nothing perturbed, Dr. Richard continued to hold the vesta in the same position while we watched with

extreme interest the face of our subject. Not a change appeared in it, no contraction of the features to denote suffering, not the flicker of an eyelid, not a muscle twitched.

"When the vesta was burned almost to its end, Dr. Richard extinguished it and requested us to examine the foot. The sock was burned through in a place about the size of a franc-piece, but on its removal the foot was found to be not even irritated by the flame which had rested upon its naked surface.

"'Another anesthetic area,' remarked Dr. Richard. 'He is an excellent subject. Now for one more test. Voisin, this time I shall burn your foot and you shall feel pain. Tell me when you can endure it no longer.' And standing at least two feet away from the subject Richard produced another vesta and without lighting it held it in his hand. Almost instantly Voisin moved his foot uneasily and the muscles of his face contracted violently, while an expression of agony appeared upon them.

"'*Mon Dieu,*' he almost screamed. 'Doctor, I am suffering horribly.'

"'Very well,' Dr. Richard assured him, 'it is all over now and we will not hurt you again. Gentlemen, be kind enough to examine the patient's foot.'

"We moved eagerly forward and perceived on the sole a round red spot, precisely similar to that produced by a rather severe burn.

"'Fine, fine!'

"It was a chorus of approval, and Dr. Richard showed more enthusiasm than I had ever believed him capable of.

"'That will do for tonight. He is completely hypnotized. It remains only for us to weigh him in order to put our theory to its first test,' concluded Dr. Richard, opening the door and beckoning to the gendarmes, who advanced and lifted Voisin to the scales.

"'Stand up,' commanded the doctor, 'and then we will replace your fetters.'

"As straight and rigid as a man of wood the subject stood upright on the scales. Dr. Richard himself weighed him, and after consulting his notes announced that he was lighter by some three pounds than at the beginning of the séance.

"Voisin was then returned to the table and left in charge of his guard.

"Every night a similar scene was enacted with the same results. Voisin, contrary to our hopes and expectations, weighed precisely the same at the beginning of each séance as he had on the first night, and he never lost more than three pounds when tested at the conclusion. For some reason we could do nothing more than ask questions, make tests, and retire disheartened.

"ON THE evening of the eleventh day we convened as usual, and after the customary routine were preparing to take our departure when suddenly Dr. Albert, one of Dr. Richard's colleagues, cried, 'My God, look at that!'

"We turned as one man and an extraordinary sight greeted our astonished gaze. Voisin was sitting bolt upright; his terrible eyes were wide open and he was staring at us with an indescribably malignant look.

"'Don't move, gentlemen. Not one of you can take a step or speak a word,' he said, and his melodious voice had a most discordant sound. 'You have had your fun with me; now it is my turn.'

"What passed through the minds of my companions at this announcement I can, of course, only conjecture, but I know that with all the force of my will I tried to call the guard and rush forward, but my jaws were as if clamped together and I could not move a muscle.

"'You wanted to discover something about hypnotism, and have used me as your subject. You are about to learn more than you ever dreamed of, and from me. Perhaps, Dr. Richard, you will recall our first evening together,' Voisin proceeded in a tone of blended menace and triumph. 'I told you I hoped that from me you would discover something which would astonish the world. You will, but the world will not believe you should you make known your discovery.

"'You are hypnotists. So am I, and without flattery to myself I can assure you that what you have done is mere child's play to me. From my earliest recollection I have possessed the power of bending other wills to mine; that has been the secret of my success as a murderer, for I have committed more murders than you will ever hear of. I shall commit another tonight.'

"'As he spoke, Voisin's face assumed an expression so diabolical that my blood runs cold today as I recall it. Fancy the effect his words produced upon us! There we stood, bound hand and foot and gagged, as it were. And as each man heard the menace in those words, you may imagine his thoughts, but I pray none of you will ever experience them.

"Someone was to die, that was certain, for as we looked at that terrible face we realized this was no idle threat. Which one of us would be the victim? And would those of us who were left be able to avenge the murder of our comrade? Or were we all to be annihilated by the awful power of our captor?

"'Before I make my selection,' Voisin continued, 'let me tell you something which may be of interest to those who survive.'

"So there was to be only one!

"'I have boasted that I could always bend to my will the minds of other men, not one at a time, but numbers at once, and it was no vain boast. But once I failed—at my trial. If I could have had my judges alone, without the current of antipathy which surged about me from all sides and submerged me, I would tonight have been a free man. But then, Dr. Richard and you gentlemen,' bowing derisively to the spot where we stood huddled together, 'I should have been denied the pleasure of furnishing you the entertainment I have planned for you, and of showing you that as hypnotists you are the merest tyros. Before that demonstration is afforded you, I have a few things yet to tell you which may be of use to you in your future studies—to those of you who will be able to pursue them,' and again a mocking look in our direction.

"He was torturing us with the ingenuity of a fiend. I felt, and I dare say so did the others, that anything was preferable to this agony of suspense. Yes, even the knowledge that his choice had fallen upon me would have been in the nature of a relief! But he showed no haste, seeming to enjoy our anguish, as he undoubtedly did to the fullest extent of his devilish and inhuman nature.

"'I AM keeping you waiting, I see,' he resumed. 'That is unfortunate, but one of you will not object perhaps to a few minutes' delay.' And he laughed, displaying a row of gleaming white teeth.

"'Your experiment has been very amusing and I have thoroughly enjoyed it, for, as you assured me, Dr. Richard, I have suffered no pain and on the whole have been very comfortable. Even when you performed that old test of passing a hat-pin through my cheek, I was not disturbed, for I have learned to make any part of my body insensible to pain. Therefore, the vesta you held to my foot did not annoy me, but I will confess it put my powers to a test preventing a blister from ensuing; but as I have learned

how to create anesthetic areas at will, so I have acquired the knowledge of materializing a thought when and where I please. I thought, "no blister," and no blister appeared. Also, I possess the secret of damming up the blood and of interrupting the circulation at my will. So you can readily understand how easy it was for me to prevent blood from following a wound in the cheek. That is a secret I should love to share with you, gentlemen, but I fear it will not be wise to impart it to so learned a body as yourselves lest in the future you—some of you, I should say—might write one of your delightful little brochures on the subject and give to a stupid public something it has taken the masters of black magic centuries to perfect. No, I fear I must deny myself that great pleasure and take the secret with me.

" 'And that reminds me, I am still keeping you in suspense. How thoughtless! Please pardon me. We shall soon arrive at the real business of this meeting, so fortunate for me, and shall I say so unpleasant for you—for one of you!

" 'But before we do so, I must tell you that I have never been hypnotized, and you will have to admit that I am a fair actor—will you not, Dr. Richard?' with a grin at the doctor. 'However, it suited my plans to pretend, as the children say, in order that while you were studying me I might have the opportunity of studying you and of discovering which of you would best answer my purpose. I know now.'

"He paused to enjoy our agony, and when he had satiated himself upon it went on in his low, even tones, which could by no possibility have penetrated the walls and heavy doors behind which were the guards who might have saved us.

"This thought crossed my mind, but no sooner had it done so than its place was taken by others, passing with incredible swiftness the entire gamut of human emotions. Now he was about to choose. Well, let it be over! If I were the victim I was as ready to go as I had ever been, and if by going I could save the others, well and good; at least my death would not have been in vain. They were all men who were of use in the world, men who could and would benefit mankind, and their lives were valuable to the world of science, while mine was not at all important, and dear as I was to my parents I knew time would soften their grief at my loss.

"My parents! At the thought of them I felt so keen a desire to live it seemed I must be spared, I must return to their arms. Yes, I would live! I would not die here in this miserable obscure room, trapped like a rat, and done to death by the fiend who stood before me. No! Just one supreme effort of my will—just one! I would break the spell which bound me and my companions!

"My companions! Ah, they were suffering as intensely as I at that moment. Perhaps after all, I should not be chosen. Perhaps it would be Albert, or one of the others, or Dr. Richard.

"As this thought came to me I recoiled in horror from the selfish cowardice of my previous thoughts. My beloved chief, who had always been kindness itself to me, who was so noble and wise and whose continued efforts might bring health and happiness to thousands! What was my life compared to his?

"I believe without an instant's hesitation, if it had been within my power to do so, I would have thrown myself at Voisin's feet and begged him to let me offer my life in exchange for Dr. Richard's had the lot fallen upon him.

"But no notion of accepting a vicarious sacrifice was in the monster's mind. He had made his choice,

and we were soon to know upon whom it rested.

" 'You told me, Dr. Richard,' he spoke again with tormenting deliberation, 'that if I survived your experiment my execution would occur according to schedule. It is set for November 6 at sunrise, is it not? Good!

" 'On that day and hour an execution will take place—but it will not be mine.'

"He paused as if awaiting a reply, and a thrill of horror ran over me as I sensed the veiled, undefined threat in his last words.

" 'No, on that date one of you gentlemen will take my place on the scaffold, and I shall be far away, disguised so that God Himself could hardly recognize me.

" 'How will the substitution be accomplished? you are asking me. Why, in the simplest way possible to him who knows the secret. I shall take possession of one of your bodies and leave you mine in its place, after carefully ensconcing therein one of your delightful personalities. The result will be most diverting, will it not? Even amusing. I will walk calmly out of the door of this house and pursue my plans without fear of detection, while you, at my good pleasure, will arouse the guard, who will rush and seize the one amongst you whom I have selected for the honor of occupying my body, bear him off to his cell, and at the appointed hour escort him to the scaffold, where he will be duly executed. Meanwhile, I shall be thoroughly enjoying myself elsewhere. That is my plan, gentlemen. Is not the prospect delightful?'

"HORROR of horrors! Could such a monstrous, unheard-of thing be done? It was so far beyond the bounds of possibility that at first it sounded like the raving of a maniac. Yet that tone of deadly assurance in which Voisin stated his dreadful purpose filled me with a terror which almost deprived me of my reason and caused all hope to die within my breast.

" 'Upon you, Dr. Richard, I should have conferred the honor,' said Voisin slowly, 'but for the fact that I do not care to occupy your place in the world. Its demands would fatigue me and its duties prove irksome, nor are its rewards tempting. So I am sure you will pardon me for so flagrantly slighting you and for selecting your young assistant.'

"So, after all, I was chosen! I braced myself as best I could. But wait—Voisin was speaking again.

" 'Monsieur Maynard, come up into the light.'

"It was to be The Mouse.

" 'Gentlemen, you may observe this little experiment, but do not move or speak.'

"As Maynard heard the dread summons he moved mechanically forward, drawn by an irresistible force, and stood with his frail form drawn up to its full height, rigid as if hewn from stone. His eyes were fixed upon those strange and terrible eyes of Voisin, who drew him with their power so close that they were nearly touching face to face.

"Voisin's eyes narrowed to mere slits, but from them emanated a force so tremendous it was almost tangible, while in those of The Mouse an expression of horror and despair was mingled with resignation to his awful fate. Never have I seen such a look.

"When the full realization of what was occurring dawned upon me I prayed God to give me back control of my will, my power of locomotion, command of my voice. He had restored Samson's strength in his hour of need so that he might annihilate the Philistines. Would He not give us ours that we might destroy this monster before us? Surely He would not permit so horrible a crime to be committed, so frightful a sacrifice to be made!

"But despite my prayers, despite my efforts, before us was being enacted a scene the like of which had never been seen by mortal eyes.

" 'Come closer, Maynard,' said Voisin. 'Hold my hands and put your mouth up against mine. So,' he continued. 'You are nearly my size and will fit me better than one of the others would. Now in a few minutes all will be over.'

"The poor Mouse did as he was commanded, and for several minutes there reigned a silence so intense that the beating of every man's heart could be distinctly heard. A silence like the grave! You have often said it, but you do not know what silence is. There we stood, huddled together, helpless to prevent the frightful tragedy, unable to save our comrade and friend from the power of the fiend. We could only watch and suffer.

"I remember every little detail—how I wish I did not!—the blue suit Maynard wore, how neatly his boots were polished, the gleam of his class-ring as his hands were clasped in those of the monster.

"Presently two or three sharp exhalations of breath from one or the other of the men (they were so close together it was impossible to tell from which), a rending sound, a groan, a prolonged sigh, and then as God is my witness from Maynard's body spoke the voice of Voisin:

" 'That is all! You may now go to the table, lie down on it, and close your eyes. When you awake you will be Jacques Voisin, the condemned murderer, and will fulfil his destiny. You gentlemen remain where you are, and after thirty minutes have passed, call in the guard who will conduct your subject to his cell.'

"When I heard the words in Voisin's voice proceeding from Maynard's lips I realized that all the horrors I had experienced were as nothing compared to that which now filled my soul. The monstrous exchange had been made, the foul crime perpetrated, the impossible had happened, and nature's laws had been shattered before our eyes.

"Voisin, or Voisin's body, stood looking fixedly into the eyes of his *vis-à-vis*, but Voisin's beautiful voice uttered the following commands from Maynard's lips:

" 'You gentlemen will report that the experiment is concluded and that it was a failure. This is the truth from your standpoint, but I shall always consider it the most brilliant success of my life, and I thank you, one and all, most heartily for the opportunity you have given me of so satisfactorily putting my theory to the test. It has been most diverting. Get up on the table, Maynard, or, pardon me, Voisin, and you, Dr. Richard, be kind enough to fasten the fetters. Thank you,' as his commands were obeyed.

" 'Now, gentlemen, I will bid you good-night and farewell. My very best wishes to you all.'

"With that he deliberately selected Maynard's topcoat from those hanging on a chair, slowly donned it, and walking to the door turned and bowed mockingly to us. Then he descended the stairs and we soon heard the outer door close behind him.

"OF THE half hour which intervened between his departure and our release I shall say nothing—I cannot endure even the thought. But suffice it to say that at the exact moment the time was up, we rushed as one man to the door behind which were the guards who at our summons came forward, rubbing their eyes and looking like men just awakened from a profound slumber.

"Dr. Richard told them the experiment was over and ordered them to return their prisoner to his cell, for the commands of the monster must

still be carried out; despite the united efforts of our agonized hearts to shriek aloud the awful truth, we were still bound by his tremendous power.

"The Mouse was the only one who had recovered himself, and I recall how he looked from one to the other of us when he was taken away by his guard. As he passed me he said in a low, quiet tone: 'Don't be so cut up about it, Phil; you couldn't help it, and it's best that I am the one he chose. Come to see me before the 6th.'

"My eyes were so blinded by tears I could not see him go, but I heard one of the gendarmes mutter crossly: 'Here, come along, Voisin; it's no use talking foreign lingo to any of these *messieurs*. They're our friends, not yours.'

" 'That's right,' replied his mate. 'You can't get help from them even if they did teach you to talk English while you were asleep.'

"At that they both laughed and proceeded down the stairs with their prisoner.

"I SHALL not go into the details of the weeks that followed, nor of our frantic efforts to save The Mouse. We interviewed the prefect of police, the minister of justice, the president of the French Republic, the American ambassador. We told the unvarnished truth and gave the harrowing details of that terrible night. All in vain.

"We were laughed at, or what was even worse for our cause, were treated with kindly forbearance and gently but firmly shown the door, which we observed on our repeated attempts to gain a second interview was well guarded and remained closed upon us.

"We were regarded as if we were mentally unbalanced, and, as I was later informed by a friend of the embassy, were beginning to be looked upon as persons inimical to the peace and safety of the community. But nothing deterred us in our efforts, and in truth I believe the agony we endured rendered Dr. Richard and myself nearer insane than anyone suspected.

"Dr. Richard was now a broken man, upon whose face were stamped the lines of intense suffering. He could not sleep or eat, but walked constantly up and down wringing his hands and uttering feeble moans. As I contrasted him with the virile, middle-aged savant so full of hope and desire to benefit his fellow-men, who had only a few weeks before addressed us upon our first entrance into that fatal house, I was filled with compassion for him, measuring the extent of his mental anguish by my own, and knowing that the added burden of self-reproach he was bearing would soon bring to an end his brilliant and useful career.

"Of myself I had not much time to think, for all my thoughts were with my poor friend, who through no fault of his own was soon to expiate on the scaffold another's crime.

"All of my time was given to making effort in his behalf and in attempting to console my beloved master, in whose house I had taken up my abode at his request. And I am thankful that it was so, or I doubt if my mind would have stood the strain.

"As frequently as I was allowed, I visited The Mouse, who was calmly awaiting his hour of doom with Christian resignation and in his eyes the look of a man who is not afraid to meet his God.

"He thanked me for all the efforts in his behalf, but appeared to take little interest in their results, seeming to feel that no power on earth could save him. His manner was so gentle and kindly that the guards who kept watch over him became devoted to him, and one of them on my de-

parture one day asked me what we had done to Voisin, who seemed totally changed. I could not answer for the lump in my throat, and he would have laughed if I had.

"As the date of the execution drew near and all of our efforts were unavailing, I gave myself up to despair, but perceiving how much my visits meant to The Mouse, I continued to make them as often as I was allowed to do so.

"At the last one on the night before his execution I could not control my emotions and burst into tears, of which I have never been ashamed. He drew me down on the cot beside him, and placing his arm around my shoulders comforted me in the tenderest manner.

" 'Don't feel so bad about it, Phil,' he said. 'I am ready to go and think I shall be able to bear myself as a man and an American. There is no one who will grieve much over my going, except a little girl back in the States, and she is young enough to find the comfort time will surely bring. I want you to take her my class-ring, and tell her I died—oh, any way you can think of. Never try to tell her the truth. She would not believe it; she couldn't, and the story would only frighten her. I want you to have anything of mine you fancy (there isn't much); and, Philip, won't you come tomorrow? It will help me to know that you are there. If it will distress you too much,' noticing the expression on my face, 'why, never mind, but—well, do just as you feel about it. I am the last of my family. I have been proud of my name and have tried to be worthy of it, so I don't want to fail its standard of courage at the last.'

"Of course I promised, although if the choice had been given me I would rather have gone to the scaffold myself than have been present at the scene I must witness on the morrow. I would gladly have given my life to save The Mouse, and I told him so in all sincerity, but he smiled and patted my shoulder while he said: 'Nothing like that, old man! You can't be spared, for you are going to make your mark in the world. You'll be a big man one of these days, while I'd never have done much, I suspect, but take notes. So it has worked out all right after all. Now good-night and good-bye. You must go, for I am going to sleep. Cheer up!' And he clasped my hand in both of his and looked at me a long moment.

" 'Good luck!' he added as I turned abruptly away lest I break down again.

"Never shall I forget the sound of his cell door closing for the last time behind me. I hear it often in my sleep, and sometimes in quiet moments its clang reverberates through every fiber of my being and reaches my very soul, which turns faint at the remembrance it calls forth.

"I turned for one moment, and through the little grating I saw Maynard's hand waving me a last good-bye.

"OF THAT night and the next morning I shall say no more than that they passed. Maynard met his fate with heroic fortitude, but something in me died with him, and as I left him in his last resting place and turned away I felt myself an old man.

"Perhaps you will think my story the child of a disordered brain, the chimera of a heated fancy, but every word of it is true. And although many years, alas, have elapsed since the tragic occurrence, each separate detail stands out as vividly as if it were but yesterday.

"This, gentlemen," concluded Dr. Roman, "is my answer to your query."

Amru the Scribe Did Not Forget the Kindnesses of His Friend Mamoun el Idrisi

THE SULTAN'S JEST

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

Author of "The Rajah's Gift" and "The Stranger From Kurdistan"

THE old sultan sat in his palace at Angor-lana, reflectively stroked his white beard, and smiled as one who recollects an ancient jest. And it was a grim jest that he had in mind, for, though his lips curled in the shadow of a smile, his keen old eyes flamed ominously from beneath brows that, rising to points in the center like Saracenic arches, heightened the sinister expression of his leathery features.

A capricious tyrant was this old despot who pondered on the doom to inflict upon his favorite, Dhivalani, the Kashmiri bayadere, and her lover, Mamoun el Idrisi, the existence of whose illicit amour he had sensed with uncanny intuition. And so sure was he of their guilt that he devised punishment in advance of any confirmation of his suspicions; devised punishment, and awaited the arrival of Ismail, his chief wazir, who had been commissioned to trap the bayadere and her lover, Mamoun of the great house of Idris.

The sultan yawned, as might a tiger consumed with ennui, then settled back among the cushions of his dais. His smile widened; but the sinister light did not fade from his eyes.

"Read!" he commanded, addressing Amru the scribe, who sat at his master's feet.

"The spider spins her web in the palace of Cæsar," began Amru in his rich sonorous voice that time had not cracked, "and the owl stands watch in the tower of . . ."

"Enough!" snapped the sultan. "What news, Ismail?"

"A thousand years," greeted Ismail, bowing himself into the presence; "I have seized el Idrisi and Dhivalani."

"And who was the accomplice that has been smuggling Mamoun into the seraglio?"

"Saoud, the chief eunuch. He has just been sewed up in a bag and dropped into the river."

"Very good," commended the sultan. "Yes, it was just as I suspected. Mamoun has been swaggering about the court too proudly of late; Dhivalani has been entirely too vivacious; and Saoud has displayed more wealth than any honest eunuch could possibly accumulate. And so you trapped them? You did well, Ismail."

"My lord is an elephant of wisdom," observed the wazir, who was not blind to the sultan's pride in having so skilfully detected another palace intrigue. "And I, the least of his servants, have but acted upon his infallible judgment."

"Nevertheless, you did well. But tell me, Ismail, how shall we punish this Kashmiri and her lover?"

"Well . . . we might flay them alive and rub them with salt, or we might place them between planks and have them sawn asunder," suggested Ismail.

"Nonsense!" flared the sultan. "Have you no imagination? An amour is carried on in my own harem, under my very nose; and were it not for my intuition, it would still be going on. And here you suggest such commonplace punishments as though they had merely defrauded in the payment of the salt tax, or had stolen a prayer rug from the mosque!"

"My lord is a mountain of sagacity," interposed the wazir, penitently. "What would he suggest?"

The sultan shook his head despairingly.

"Ismail, you are an utter ass! You, my chief advisor, failing me when I am in need of wise counsel! I wish something novel in the way of punishment, and here you suggest the reward of a thieving camel driver!"

Odd and curious punishments were the sultan's forte; and on this occasion he demanded something distinctly different from the sanguinary slaughter and dismemberment that were the portion of petty offenders; he demanded a touch of the unique, something to tickle his sense of humor, of poetic justice. And far into the night the sultan and his chief wazir wrangled and debated, considering the matter from all angles.

All the while, Amru the scribe, whom the sultan had neglected to dismiss, nodded sleepily at the foot of his master's dais, and pondered on the exceeding folly and cruelty of old men who kept young and beautiful girls imprisoned in seraglios. He silently cursed the old man his master, who plotted strange vengeance after the fashion of a scholar resolving an abstruse problem; he cursed that fate which forced him, Amru, to sit impotently among scrolls and reeds, and hear of that which would leave the noble Idrisi a shapeless, mangled horror, a frothing, gibbering madman. And though the Prophet (upon whom be peace and power!) had denied souls to women, he shuddered as he listened to that which might be the portion of the lovely bayadere.

And then a new touch was noted in the sultan's discourse; his imagination was asserting itself in a vein of savage humor that was a distinct departure from even his most novel devices. A decision had been formed. Amru heard, and hearing, gained hope. Reflectively, the old man fingered several gold pieces he had withdrawn from his wallet. To discover where the lovers were imprisoned was by no means impossible. There was still a chance, a chance he would take though it cost him his head; for Mamoun was the friend of Amru, and a noble young man who respected old poets. And as Amru listened to the sultan's perfecting of the device under consideration, his hopes flamed high and fiercely. A word, but a word or two. . .

Yet all this brave hope was vanity: for the sultan, after dismissing his wazir, addressed the scribe.

"Amru, due to my carelessness you have heard more than is good for you. Mamoun is your friend; and to leave you free to work your will tonight would inflict too great a strain upon your loyalty to me, your master."

The scribe's wrinkled features were devoid of expression as he met the sultan's hard, keen gaze; but he sensed that the sultan's intuition had divined his very thoughts.

"And to save you from being torn between loyalty to me and your friendship for Mamoun," continued the sultan, "I shall keep you within arm's reach until sunrise, after which it will be too late for you to be overcome by kindly sentiments."

Again the old despot smiled in anticipation of the doom that was to be inflicted the following morning.

"What is my lord's pleasure?"

"You shall spend the night in shackles at the foot of my couch,

guarded by one whose head shall answer for your continuous presence. Follow me."

SUNRISE awakened the fierce old sultan to thoughts of the day's wrath.

"Release him," he directed the sentry who had guarded Amru. And then to the scribe, "The few minutes between now and the appearance of the prisoners in the hall of audience can avail you naught. And thus have I saved you from chosing between fidelity to me, or to your friend, el Idrisi. To your duties, Amru!"

The sultan smiled ironically. But he did not observe the curious light in Amru's eye as the scribe bowed himself from the presence; nor did he observe that Amru fingered a golden coin.

It was but a few minutes after the morning prayer that Amru took his post at the right of the sultan's dais in the hall of audience. Disposing about him his inks, reeds, and scrolls, he awaited the appearance of the court, and the pronouncing of doom upon Mamoun and the lovely Kashmiri bayadere. And as he waited, Amru peered anxiously about him, and with nervous impatience.

A moment later Iftikar the executioner, a huge negro, nude save for a scarlet loin-cloth, made his appearance in the hall of audience. Instead of his ponderous, crescent-bladed simitar with which he usually executed the sultan's judgments, the African bore a tray upon which reposed two small flagons, and two large goblets of ancient, curiously wrought Cairene glass.

"And with you, exceeding peace," returned Amru in response to the negro's salutation. "But where is your simitar? Is this to be a drinking bout instead of a passing of judgment?"

"Who am I to question the master?" countered the executioner. "Though I doubt that he will make me his cupbearer, for he claims that in the entire world there is no one who can make head and shoulders part company as neatly as I can," concluded the African with a justifiable touch of pride.

The negro turned to pick up the tray he had set on the steps of the dais.

"Just a moment, Iftikar," began the scribe; "since you have traveled so much, perhaps you can tell me what manner of coin this is."

The executioner took the proffered gold piece and examined it closely.

"It is a Feringhi coin, such as I once saw in the *souk* in Cairo," he announced. "And the image on it is that of an infidel sultan, upon whom be the wrath of Allah! But where did you get it?"

Before Amru could explain, a great gong sounded to announce the approach of the sultan and his court. The African tossed the gold piece to Amru, seized the tray, and took his post at the left of the judgment seat.

Eight cadaverous Annamite fan-bearers filed into the hall of audience and disposed themselves about the dais. Following them came a detachment of the guard, resplendent captains of horse, and pompously strutting officers of the sultan's household, officials, and distinguished visitors. Then came Ismail, the chief wazir, stalking majestically to his position on the topmost step, and to the left of the dais; and last of all, the sultan himself, lean, hook-nosed vulture, who, after taking his seat, signaled to Amru to read, as was the custom of the court, a verse from Al Qurán.

"By the noonday brightness, and by the night when it darkeneth," intoned the scribe, "thy lord hath not forsaken thee, nor hath he been displeased. . ."

"Sufficient! Bring in the prisoners!" commanded the sultan. And

again he smiled as one who contemplates a subtle jest.

Mamoun el Idrisi, handsome and arrogant, and calm in the face of certain and unpleasant doom, was escorted to the foot of the dais to face the sultan's wrath; and with him was the Kashmiri bayadere, the wondrously lovely Dhivalani, beautiful, and equally composed in the presence of her sinister lord and master. All hope was gone, if ever hope there had been. No mercy could be expected from that fierce old man who smiled evilly from his commanding position. They had had their hour or two of grace, had tempted fate, had lost; and the utter hopelessness of it all made them unnaturally calm and self-possessed.

"You, Dhivalani, who were my favorite, and you, Mamoun el Idrisi, upon whom I conferred wealth and honor," began the sultan, whose words rolled forth like the cruel, resistless march of destiny, "have merited the sentence I shall pronounce, and more. My father, upon whom be peace, boiled his favorite in a great caldron and fed the broth to her lover until he choked from having had his fill of the lady; and my grandfather, who sits in paradise at the Prophet's right hand, was even more severe."

The bayadere shuddered, more at the sultan's sardonic smile than at the horror he had mentioned. But Mamoun of the great race of Idris met the sultan's gaze unmoved.

"But I shall be merciful," continued the sultan. "No man or woman could live through enough torment to do you justice. In the end, you would die and cheat my vengeance; therefore have I devised so that your punishment shall outlast any that have ever before been inflicted. And to achieve that end, one of you must live."

The sultan paused to observe the effect of his words. In the eyes of each of the lovers he saw hope for the other. And then that fierce old man signaled to the African to advance.

"Here you see two flagons of wine, and two glasses. One is pure, the other charged with a poison laden with all the slow torments and consuming flames of that hell reserved for the infidel. Dhivalani, you shall select a glass for yourself, and leave one for your lover. Each shall drink; and the survivor shall go into exile, free and unharmed. That I swear by the Prophet's beard, and in the presence of the lords of the court. Dhivalani, choose your glass; and if you live, may you live long with the knowledge that you poisoned your lover; Mamoun, drink the glass she leaves you, and if by chance you survive, be happy in the knowledge of the madness and torment that bought your worthless life for you."

The sultan nodded to the African, who poured from each flagon into the glass standing next to it, then, advancing a pace, offered the girl her choice.

With the air of one trapped in the mazes of a hideous dream, the bayadere extended her slim, jeweled arm to indicate the goblet which would doom her to life, or sentence her lover to live at her cost. And then she hesitated.

"May I taste each glass before I make my choice?"

"That you may not do; nor, having made your selection, may you drink together. Each must meet fate alone; therefore, choose, and be happy in your choice," concluded the sultan with a twisted, satiric smile.

"Son of a thousand pigs!" began el Idrisi hoarsely; "inflict whatsoever you will! Do you think that I will buy my life with hers?"

"Indeed? Then perhaps you would rather see her eaten by starving rats, or would you have her as your companion in a bed of quicklime?" And the sultan, in the monotone of a priest chanting a pagan hymn, enumerated

that which he could inflict even worse than that which he first mentioned.

"Therefore I fancy that you will accept my merciful sentence. And do not seek to arouse my wrath with rash words, hoping for a swift sword-stroke; for I have set my heart on this jest, and on none other. In half an hour I shall visit you to see whether you have drunk this wine. And if not, you shall both endure that which I but mentioned, and more whereof even I have not dreamed. Dhivalani," he concluded, "make your choice."

And at these words Dhivalani with a gesture indicated the glass from which she would drink, and that which would remain as the portion of her lover. A moment's pause; an exchange of glances; the half parting of lips speaking a speechless farewell; and then members of the guard, followed by slaves who bore the fatal wine, escorted the lovers to separate rooms where each would meet destiny alone, without even the solace of a word of farewell ere the swiftly spreading poison executed the sultan's vengeance.

An attendant approached and presented to Iftikar his great simitar; and other justice was dispensed, swift, sure, sanguinary. All the while the sultan smiled, as if in anticipation of a rare jest. At last he arose, dismissed the court, and, accompanied by Ismail, entered the room to which Mamoun had been taken to meet his fate.

El Idrisi lay on the tiled floor. A pool of blood testified that a poniard which had eluded the search of the guard had done its work well.

"I have won!" gasped el Idrisi, exultantly. "By your oath, you must set her free, for I did indeed taste the wine, and the bitterness thereof. But rather than drink it and die by her choice, I am dying by my own hand."

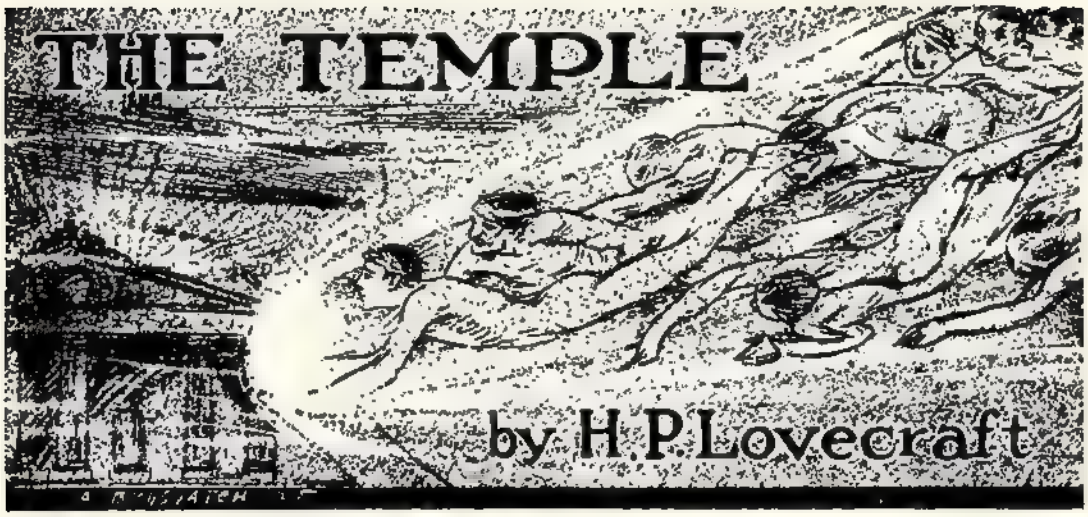
To which the sultan smilingly retorted, "But you lose, Mamoun, for the bitterness which you tasted was but that natural to the wine. Neither glass was poisoned; and each of you was to be set free, forever to mourn in exile the life gained at the other's cost. I shall keep my oath and set her free, even as I would have done for you. You two might some day have met on the road of destiny; but now you die, knowing that you have sentenced her to believe that her choice gave her life at your cost."

"Father of many pigs," coughed el Idrisi, "you lie!"

"Then look, Mamoun, see whether or not this wine is poisoned."

And smiling at his own excellent jest, the sultan drank the wine at a draft.

The next day a new sultan ruled in Angor-lana; for Amru, unable to warn the lovers of the sultan's jest, had in the kindness of his heart poisoned both flagons of wine while the African executioner had been examining the Feringhi coin.



Author of "The Hound," "The Rats in the Walls," etc.

[*Manuscript found on the coast of Yucatan.*]

ON AUGUST 20, 1917, I, Karl Heinrich, Graf von Altberg-Ehrenstein, Lieutenant-Commander in the Imperial German Navy and in charge of the submarine U-29, deposit this bottle and record in the Atlantic Ocean at a point to me unknown but probably about N. Latitude 20 degrees, W. Longitude 35 degrees, where my ship lies disabled on the ocean floor. I do so because of my desire to set certain unusual facts before the public; a thing I shall not in all probability survive to accomplish in person, since the circumstances surrounding me are as menacing as they are extraordinary, and involve not only the hopeless crippling of the U-29, but the impairment of my iron German will in a manner most disastrous.

On the afternoon of June 18, as reported by wireless to the U-61, bound for Kiel, we torpedoed the British freighter *Victory*, New York to Liverpool, in N. Latitude 45 degrees 16 minutes, W. Longitude 28 degrees 34 minutes; permitting the crew to leave in boats in order to obtain a good cinema view for the admiralty records. The ship sank quite picturesquely, bow first, the stern rising high out of the water whilst the hull shot down perpendicularly to the bottom of the sea. Our camera missed nothing, and I regret that so fine a reel of film should never reach Berlin. After that we sank the lifeboats with our guns and submerged.

When we rose to the surface about sunset a seaman's body was found on the deck, hands gripping the railing in curious fashion. The poor fellow was young, rather dark, and very handsome; probably an Italian or Greek, and undoubtedly of the *Victory's* crew. He had evidently sought refuge on the very ship which had been forced to destroy his own—one more victim of the unjust war of aggression which the English pig-dogs are waging upon the Fatherland. Our men searched him for souvenirs, and found in his coat pocket a very odd bit of ivory carved to represent a youth's head crowned with laurel. My fellow-officer, Lieutenant Klenze, believed that the thing was of great age and artistic value, so took it from the men for himself. How it had ever come into the possession of a common sailor neither he nor I could imagine.

As the dead man was thrown overboard there occurred two incidents which created much disturbance amongst the crew. The fellow's eyes had been closed; but in the dragging of his body to the rail they were jarred open, and many seemed to entertain a queer delusion that they gazed steadily and mockingly at Schmidt and Zimmer, who were bent over the corpse. Then Boatswain Müller, an elderly man who would have known better had he not been a superstitious Alsatian swine, became so excited by this impression that he watched the body in the water; and swore that after it sank a little it drew its limbs into a swimming position and sped away to the south under the waves. Klenze and I did not like these displays of peasant ignorance, and severely reprimanded the men, particularly Müller.

The next day a very troublesome situation was created by the indisposition of some of the crew. They were evidently suffering from the nervous strain of our long voyage, and had had bad dreams. Several seemed quite dazed and stupid; and after satisfying myself that they were not feigning their weakness, I excused them from their duties. The sea was rather rough, so we descended to a depth where the waves were less troublesome. Here we were comparatively calm, despite a somewhat puzzling southward current which we could not identify from our oceanographic charts. The moans of the sick men were decidedly annoying; but since they did not appear to demoralize the rest of the crew, we did not resort to extreme measures. It was our plan to remain where we were and intercept the liner *Dacia*, mentioned in information from agents in New York.

In the early evening we rose to the surface, and found the sea less heavy. The smoke of a battleship was on the northern horizon, but our distance and ability to submerge made us safe. What worried us more was the talk of Boatswain Müller, which grew wilder as night came on. He was in a detestably childish state, and babbled of some illusion of dead bodies drifting past the undersea portholes; bodies which looked at him intensely, and which he recognized in spite of bloating as having seen dying during some of our victorious German exploits. And he said that the young man we had found and tossed overboard was their leader. This was very gruesome and abnormal, so we confined Müller in irons and had him soundly whipped. The men were not pleased at his punishment, but discipline was necessary. We also denied the request of a delegation headed by Seaman Zimmer, that the curious carved ivory head be cast into the sea.

On June 20, Seamen Bohm and Schmidt, who had been ill the day before, became violently insane. I regretted that no physician was included in our complement of officers, since German lives are precious; but the constant ravings of the two concerning a terrible curse were most subversive of discipline, so drastic steps were taken. The crew accepted the event in a sullen fashion, but it seemed to quiet Müller; who thereafter gave us no trouble. In the evening we released him, and he went about his duties silently.

In the week that followed we were all very nervous, watching for the *Dacia*. The tension was aggravated by the disappearance of Müller and Zimmer, who undoubtedly committed suicide as a result of the fears which had seemed to harass them, though they were not observed in the act of jumping overboard. I was rather glad to be rid of Müller, for even his silence had unfavorably affected the crew. Everyone seemed inclined to be silent now, as though holding a

secret fear. Many were ill, but none made a disturbance. Lieutenant Klenze chafed under the strain, and was annoyed by the merest trifles—such as the school of dolphins which gathered about the U-29 in increasing numbers, and the growing intensity of that southward current which was not on our chart.

It at length became apparent that we had missed the *Dacia* altogether. Such failures are not uncommon, and we were more pleased than disappointed; since our return to Wilhelmshaven was now in order. At noon June 28 we turned northeastward, and despite some rather comical entanglements with the unusual masses of dolphins were soon under way.

The explosion in the engine room at 2 P. M. was wholly a surprize. No defect in the machinery or carelessness in the men had been noticed, yet without warning the ship was racked from end to end with a colossal shock. Lieutenant Klenze hurried to the engine room, finding the fuel-tank and most of the mechanism shattered, and Engineers Raabe and Schneider instantly killed. Our situation had suddenly become grave indeed; for though the chemical air regenerators were intact, and though we could use the devices for raising and submerging the ship and opening the hatches as long as compressed air and storage batteries might hold out, we were powerless to propel or guide the submarine. To seek rescue in the lifeboats would be to deliver ourselves into the hands of enemies unreasonably embittered against our great German nation, and our wireless had failed ever since the *Victory* affair to put us in touch with a fellow U-boat of the Imperial Navy.

From the hour of the accident till July 2 we drifted constantly to the south, almost without plans and encountering no vessel. Dolphins still encircled the U-29, a somewhat remarkable circumstance considering the distance we had covered. On the morning of July 2 we sighted a warship flying American colors, and the men became very restless in their desire to surrender. Finally Lieutenant Klenze had to shoot a seaman named Traube, who urged this un-German act with especial violence. This quieted the crew for the time, and we submerged unseen.

The next afternoon a dense flock of sea-birds appeared from the south, and the ocean began to heave ominously. Closing our hatches, we awaited developments until we realized that we must either submerge or be swamped in the mounting waves. Our air pressure and electricity were diminishing, and we wished to avoid all unnecessary use of our slender mechanical resources; but in this case there was no choice. We did not descend far, and when after several hours the sea was calmer, we decided to return to the surface. Here, however, a new trouble developed; for the ship failed to respond to our direction in spite of all that the mechanics could do. As the men grew more frightened at this undersea imprisonment, some of them began to mutter again about Lieutenant Klenze's ivory image, but the sight of an automatic pistol calmed them. We kept the poor devils as busy as we could, tinkering at the machinery even when we knew it was useless.

KLENZE and I usually slept at different times; and it was during my sleep, about 5 A. M., July 4, that the general mutiny broke loose. The six remaining pigs of seamen, suspecting that we were lost, had suddenly burst into a mad fury at our refusal to surrender to the Yankee battleship two days before; and were in a delirium of cursing and destruction. They roared like the animals they were, and broke instruments and

furniture indiscriminately; screaming about such nonsense as the curse of the ivory image and the dark dead youth who looked at them and swam away. Lieutenant Klenze seemed paralyzed and inefficient, as one might expect of a soft, womanish Rhinelander. I shot all six men, for it was necessary, and made sure that none remained alive.

We expelled the bodies through the double hatches and were alone in the U-29. Klenze seemed very nervous, and drank heavily. It was decided that we remain alive as long as possible, using the large stock of provisions and chemical supply of oxygen, none of which had suffered from the crazy antics of those swine-hound seamen. Our compasses, depth gages, and other delicate instruments were ruined; so that henceforth our only reckoning would be guess-work, based on our watches, the calendar, and our apparent drift as judged by any objects we might spy through the portholes or from the conning tower. Fortunately we had storage batteries still capable of long use, both for interior lighting and for the searchlight. We often cast a beam around the ship, but saw only dolphins, swimming parallel to our own drifting course. I was scientifically interested in those dolphins; for though the ordinary *Delphinus delphis* is a cetacean mammal, unable to subsist without air, I watched one of the swimmers closely for two hours, and did not see him alter his submerged condition.

With the passage of time Klenze and I decided that we were still drifting south, meanwhile sinking deeper and deeper. We noted the marine fauna and flora, and read much on the subject in the books I had carried with me for spare moments. I could not help observing, however, the inferior scientific knowledge of my companion. His mind was not Prussian, but given to imaginings and speculations which have no value. The fact of our coming death affected him curiously, and he would frequently pray in remorse over the men, women, and children we had sent to the bottom; forgetting that all things are noble which serve the German state. After a time he became noticeably unbalanced, gazing for hours at his ivory image and weaving fanciful stories of the lost and forgotten things under the sea. Sometimes, as a psychological experiment, I would lead him on in these wanderings, and listen to his endless poetical quotations and tales of sunken ships. I was very sorry for him, for I dislike to see a German suffer; but he was not a good man to die with. For myself I was proud, knowing how the Fatherland would revere my memory and how my sons would be taught to be men like me.

On August 9, we espied the ocean floor, and sent a powerful beam from the searchlight over it. It was a vast undulating plain, mostly covered with seaweed, and strown with the shells of small mollusks. Here and there were slimy objects of puzzling contour, draped with weeds and encrusted with barnacles, which Klenze declared must be ancient ships lying in their graves. He was puzzled by one thing, a peak of solid matter, protruding above the ocean bed nearly four feet at its apex; about two feet thick, with flat sides and smooth upper surfaces which met at a very obtuse angle. I called the peak a bit of outcropping rock, but Klenze thought he saw carvings on it. After a while he began to shudder, and turned away from the scene as if frightened; yet could give no explanation save that he was overcome with the vastness, darkness, remoteness, antiquity, and mystery of the oceanic abysses. His mind was tired, but I am always a German, and was quick to notice two things: that the U-29 was standing the deep-sea

pressure splendidly, and that the peculiar dolphins were still about us, even at a depth where the existence of high organisms is considered impossible by most naturalists. That I had previously overestimated our depth, I was sure; but none the less we must still be deep enough to make these phenomena remarkable. Our southward speed, as gaged by the ocean floor, was about as I had estimated from the organisms passed at higher levels.

It was at 3:15 P. M., August 12, that poor Klenze went wholly mad. He had been in the conning tower using the searchlight when I saw him bound into the library compartment where I sat reading, and his face at once betrayed him. I will repeat here what he said, underlining the words he emphasized: "*He* is calling! *He* is calling! I hear him! We must go!" As he spoke he took his ivory image from the table, pocketed it, and seized my arm in an effort to drag me up the companionway to the deck. In a moment I understood that he meant to open the hatch and plunge with me into the water outside, a vagary of suicidal and homicidal mania for which I was scarcely prepared. As I hung back and attempted to soothe him he grew more violent, saying: "Come now—do not wait until later; it is better to repent and be forgiven than to defy and be condemned." Then I tried the opposite of the soothing plan, and told him he was mad—pitifully demented. But he was unmoved, and cried: "If I am mad, it is mercy! May the gods pity the man who in his callousness can remain sane to the hideous end! Come and be mad whilst *he* still calls with mercy!"

This outburst seemed to relieve a pressure in his brain; for as he finished he grew much milder, asking me to let him depart alone if I would not accompany him. My course at once became clear. He was a German, but only a Rhinelander and a commoner; and he was now a potentially dangerous madman. By complying with his suicidal request I could immediately free myself from one who was no longer a companion but a menace. I asked him to give me the ivory image before he went, but this request brought from him such uncanny laughter that I did not repeat it. Then I asked him if he wished to leave any keepsake or lock of hair for his family in Germany in case I should be rescued, but again he gave me that strange laugh. So as he climbed the ladder I went to the levers and allowing proper time-intervals operated the machinery which sent him to his death. After I saw that he was no longer in the boat I threw the searchlight around the water in an effort to obtain a last glimpse of him; since I wished to ascertain whether the water-pressure would flatten him as it theoretically should, or whether the body would be unaffected, like those extraordinary dolphins. I did not, however, succeed in finding my late companion, for the dolphins were massed thickly and obscuringly about the conning tower.

That evening I regretted that I had not taken the ivory image surreptitiously from poor Klenze's pocket as he left, for the memory of it fascinated me. I could not forget the youthful, beautiful head with its leafy crown, though I am not by nature an artist. I was also sorry that I had no one with whom to converse. Klenze, though not my mental equal, was much better than no one. I did not sleep well that night, and wondered exactly when the end would come. Surely, I had little enough chance of rescue.

The next day I ascended to the conning tower and commenced the customary searchlight explorations. Northward the view was much the

same as it had been all the four days since we had sighted the bottom, but I perceived that the drifting of the U-29 was less rapid. As I swung the beam around to the south, I noticed that the ocean floor ahead fell away in a marked declivity, and bore curiously regular blocks of stone in certain places, disposed as if in accordance with definite patterns. The boat did not at once descend to match the greater ocean depth, so I was soon forced to adjust the searchlight to cast a sharply downward beam. Owing to the abruptness of the change a wire was disconnected, which necessitated a delay of many minutes for repairs; but at length the light streamed on again, flooding the marine valley below me.

I am not given to emotion of any kind, but my amazement was very great when I saw what lay revealed in that electrical glow. And yet as one reared in the best *kultur* of Prussia I should not have been amazed, for geology and tradition alike tell us of great transpositions in oceanic and continental areas. What I saw was an extended and elaborate array of ruined edifices; all of magnificent though unclassified architecture, and in various stages of preservation. Most appeared to be of marble, gleaming whitely in the rays of the searchlight, and the general plan was of a large city at the bottom of a narrow valley, with numerous isolated temples and villas on the steep slopes above. Roofs were fallen and columns were broken, but there still remained an air of immemorially ancient splendor which nothing could efface.

Confronted at last with the Atlantis I had formerly deemed largely a myth, I was the most eager of explorers. At the bottom of that valley a river once had flowed; for as I examined the scene more closely I beheld the remains of stone and marble bridges and sea-walls, and terraces and embankments once verdant and beautiful. In my enthusiasm I became nearly as idiotic and sentimental as poor Klenze, and was very tardy in noticing that the southward current had ceased at last, allowing the U-29 to settle slowly down upon the sunken city as an airplane settles upon a town of the upper earth. I was slow, too, in realizing that the school of unusual dolphins had vanished.

In about two hours the boat rested in a paved plaza close to the rocky wall of the valley. On one side I could view the entire city as it sloped from the plaza down to the old riverbank; on the other side, in startling proximity, I was confronted by the richly ornate and perfectly preserved façade of a great building, evidently a temple, hollowed from the solid rock. Of the original workmanship of this titanic thing I can only make conjectures. The façade, of immense magnitude, apparently covers a continuous hollow recess; for its windows are many and widely distributed. In the center yawns a great open door, reached by an impressive flight of steps, and surrounded by exquisite carvings like the figures of Bacchanals in relief. Foremost of all are the great columns and frieze, both decorated with sculptures of inexpressible beauty; obviously portraying idealized pastoral scenes and processions of priests and priestesses bearing strange ceremonial devices in adoration of a radiant god. The art is of the most phenomenal perfection, largely Hellenic in idea, yet strangely individual. It imparts an impression of terrible antiquity, as though it were the remotest rather than the immediate ancestor of Greek art. Nor can I doubt that every detail of this massive product was fashioned from the virgin hillside rock of our planet. It is palpably a part of the valley wall, though how the vast interior was ever excavated I cannot imagine. Perhaps

a cavern or series of caverns furnished the nucleus. Neither age nor submersion has corroded the pristine grandeur of this awful fane—for fane indeed it must be—and today after thousands of years it rests untarnished and inviolate in the endless night and silence of an ocean chasm.

I cannot reckon the number of hours I spent in gazing at the sunken city with its buildings, arches, statues, and bridges, and the colossal temple with its beauty and mystery. Though I knew that death was near, my curiosity was consuming; and I threw the searchlight's beam about in eager quest. The shaft of light permitted me to learn many details, but refused to show anything within the gaping door of the rock-hewn temple; and after a time I turned off the current, conscious of the need of conserving power. The rays were now perceptibly dimmer than they had been during the weeks of drifting. And as if sharpened by the coming deprivation of light, my desire to explore the watery secrets grew. I, a German, should be the first to tread those eon-forgotten ways!

I produced and examined a deep-sea diving suit of jointed metal, and experimented with the portable light and air regenerator. Though I should have trouble in managing the double hatches alone, I believed I could overcome all obstacles with my scientific skill and actually walk about the dead city in person.

On August 16 I effected an exit from the U-29, and laboriously made my way through the ruined and mud-choked streets to the ancient river. I found no skeletons or other human remains, but gleaned a wealth of archeological lore from sculptures and coins. Of this I cannot now speak save to utter my awe at a culture in the full noon of glory when cave-dwellers roamed Europe and the Nile flowed unwatched to the sea. Others, guided by this manuscript if it shall ever be found, must unfold the mysteries at which I can only hint. I returned to the boat as my electric batteries grew feeble, resolved to explore the rock temple on the following day.

On the 17th, as my impulse to search out the mystery of the temple waxed still more insistent, a great disappointment befell me; for I found that the materials needed to replenish the portable light had perished in the mutiny of those pigs in July. My rage was unbounded, yet my German sense forbade me to venture unprepared into an utterly black interior which might prove the lair of some indescribable marine monster or a labyrinth of passages from whose windings I could never extricate myself. All I could do was to turn on the waning searchlight of the U-29, and with its aid walk up the temple steps and study the exterior carvings. The shaft of light entered the door at an upward angle, and I peered in to see if I could glimpse anything, but all in vain. Not even the roof was visible; and though I took a step or two inside after testing the floor with a staff, I dared not go farther. Moreover, for the first time in my life I experienced the emotion of dread. I began to realize how some of poor Klenze's moods had arisen, for as the temple drew me more and more, I feared its aqueous abysses with a blind and mounting terror. Returning to the submarine, I turned off the lights and sat thinking in the dark. Electricity must now be saved for emergencies.

SATURDAY the 18th I spent in total darkness, tormented by thoughts and memories that threatened to overcome my German will. Klenze had gone mad and perished before reaching this sinister remnant of a past unwholesomely remote, and had advised me to go with him. Was, indeed, Fate preserving my reason only to draw me irresistibly to an end more

horrible and unthinkable than any man has dreamed of? Clearly, my nerves were sorely taxed, and I must cast off these impressions of weaker men.

I could not sleep Saturday night, and turned on the lights regardless of the future. It was annoying that the electricity should not last out the air and provisions. I revived my thoughts of euthanasia, and examined my automatic pistol. Toward morning I must have dropped asleep with the lights on, for I awoke in darkness yesterday afternoon to find the batteries dead. I struck several matches in succession, and desperately regretted the improvidence which had caused us long ago to use up the few candles we carried.

After the fading of the last match I dared to waste, I sat very quietly without a light. As I considered the inevitable end my mind ran over preceding events, and developed a hitherto dormant impression which would have caused a weaker and more superstitious man to shudder. *The head of the radiant god in the sculptures on the rock temple is the same as that carven bit of ivory which the dead sailor brought from the sea and which poor Klenze carried back into the sea.*

I was a little dazed by this coincidence, but did not become terrified. It is only the inferior thinker who hastens to explain the singular and the complex by the primitive short cut of supernaturalism. The coincidence was strange, but I was too sound a reasoner to connect circumstances which admit of no logical connection, or to associate in any uncanny fashion the disastrous events which had led from the *Victory* affair to my present plight. Feeling the need of more rest, I took a sedative and secured some more sleep. My nervous condition was reflected in my dreams, for I seemed to hear the cries of drowning persons, and to see dead faces pressing against the portholes of the boat. And among the dead faces was the living, mocking face of the youth with the ivory image.

I MUST be careful how I record my awakening today, for I am unstrung, and much hallucination is necessarily mixed with fact. Psychologically my case is most interesting, and I regret that it cannot be observed scientifically by a competent German authority. Upon opening my eyes my first sensation was an overmastering desire to visit the rock temple; a desire which grew every instant, yet which I automatically sought to resist through some emotion of fear which operated in the reverse direction. Next there came to me the impression of *light* amidst the darkness of dead batteries, and I seemed to see a sort of phosphorescent glow in the water through the porthole which opened toward the temple. This aroused my curiosity, for I knew of no deep-sea organism capable of emitting such luminosity. But before I could investigate there came a third impression which because of its irrationality caused me to doubt the objectivity of anything my senses might record. It was an aural delusion; a sensation of rhythmic, melodic sound as of some wild yet beautiful chant or choral hymn, coming from the outside through the absolutely sound-proof hull of the U-29. Convinced of my psychological and nervous abnormality, I lighted some matches and poured a stiff dose of sodium bromide solution, which seemed to calm me to the extent of dispelling the illusion of sound. But the phosphorescence remained, and I had difficulty in repressing a childish impulse to go to the porthole and seek its source. It was horribly realistic, and I could soon distinguish by its aid the familiar objects around me, as well as the

(Continued on page 429)

WEIRD STORY REPRINTS

*No. 3. The Furnished Room**

A Ghost-tale of New York City

By O. HENRY

RESTLESS, shifting, fugacious as time itself is a certain vast bulk of the population of the red brick district of the lower West Side. Homeless, they have a hundred homes. They flit from furnished room to furnished room, transients forever—transients in abode, transients in heart and mind. They sing "Home, Sweet Home" in ragtime; they carry their *lares et penates* in a bandbox; their vine is entwined about a picture hat; a rubber plant is their fig tree.

Hence the houses of this district, having had a thousand dwellers, should have a thousand tales to tell, mostly dull ones, no doubt; but it would be strange if there could not be found a ghost or two in the wake of all these vagrant guests.

One evening after dark a young man prowled among these crumbling red mansions, ringing their bells. At the twelfth he rested his lean hand-baggage upon the step and wiped the dust from his hatband and forehead. The bell sounded faint and far away in some remote, hollow depths.

To the door of this, the twelfth house whose bell he had rung, came a housekeeper who made him think of an unwholesome surfeited worm that had eaten its nut to a hollow shell and now sought to fill the vacancy with edible lodgers.

He asked if there was a room to let.

"Come in," said the housekeeper. Her voice came from her throat; her throat seemed lined with fur. "I have the third floor back, vacant since a week back. Should you wish to look at it?"

The young man followed her up the stairs. A faint light from no particular source mitigated the shadows of the halls. They trod noiselessly upon a stair carpet that its own loom would have forsworn. It seemed to have become vegetable; to have degenerated in that rank, sunless air to lush lichen or spreading moss that grew in patches to the staircase and was viscid under the foot like organic matter. At each turn of the stairs were vacant niches in the wall. Perhaps plants had once been set within them. If so they had died in that foul and tainted air. It may be that statues of the saints had stood there, but it was not difficult to conceive that imps and devils had dragged them forth in the darkness and down to the unholy depths of some furnished pit below.

"This is the room," said the housekeeper, from her furry throat. "It's a nice room. It ain't often vacant. I had some most elegant people in it last summer—no trouble at all, and paid in advance to the minute. The water's at the end of the hall. Sprowls and Mooney kept it three months. They done a vaudeville

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sketch. Miss B'retta Sprowls—you may have heard of her—oh, that was just the stage names—right there over the dresser is where the marriage certificate hung, framed. The gas is here, and you see there is plenty of closet room. It's a room everybody likes. It never stays idle long."

"Do you have many theatrical people rooming here?" asked the young man.

"They comes and goes. A good proportion of my lodgers is connected with the theaters. Yes, sir, this is the theatrical district. Actor people never stays long anywhere. I get my share. Yes, they comes and they goes."

He engaged the room, paying for a week in advance. He was tired, he said, and would take possession at once. He counted out the money. The room had been made ready, she said, even to towels and water. As the housekeeper moved away he put, for the thousandth time, the question that he carried at the end of his tongue.

"A young girl—Miss Vashner—Miss Eloise Vashner—do you remember such a one among your lodgers? She would be singing on the stage, most likely. A fair girl, of medium height and slender, with reddish, gold hair and a dark mole near her left eyebrow."

"No, I don't remember the name. Them stage people has names they change as often as their rooms. They comes and they goes. No, I don't call that one to mind."

No. Always no. Five months of ceaseless interrogation and the inevitable negative. So much time spent by day in questioning managers, agents, schools and choruses; by night among the audiences of theaters from all-star casts down to music halls so low that he dreaded to find what he most hoped for. He who had loved her best had tried to find her. He was sure that since her disappearance from home this great, water-girt city held her somewhere, but it was like a monstrous quicksand, shifting its particles constantly, with no foundation, its upper granules of today buried tomorrow in ooze and slime.

The furnished room received its latest guest with a first glow of pseudo-hospitality, a hectic, haggard, perfunctory welcome like the specious smile of a demirep. The sophistical comfort came in reflected gleams from the decayed furniture, the ragged brocade upholstery of a couch and two chairs, a foot-wide cheap pier glass between the two windows, from one or two gilt picture frames and a brass bedstead in a corner.

The guest reclined, inert, upon a chair, while the room, confused in speech as though it were an apartment in Babel, tried to discourse to him of its divers tenantry.

A polychromatic rug like some brilliant-flowered rectangular, tropical islet lay surrounded by a billowy sea of soiled matting. Upon the gay-papered wall were those pictures that pursue the homeless one from house to house—The Huguenot Lovers, The First Quarrel, The Wedding Breakfast, Psyche at the Fountain. The mantel's chastely severe outline was ingloriously veiled behind some pert drapery drawn rakishly askew like the sashes of the Amazonian ballet. Upon it was some desolate flotsam cast aside by the room's marooned when a lucky sail had borne them to a fresh port—a trifling vase or two, pictures of actresses, a medicine bottle, some stray cards out of a deck.

One by one, as the characters of a cryptograph become explicit, the little signs left by the furnished room's procession of guests developed a significance. The threadbare space in the rug in front of the dresser told that lovely woman had marched in the throng. The tiny finger prints on the wall spoke of little prisoners

trying to feel their way to sun and air. A splattered stain, raying like the shadow of a bursting bomb, witnessed where a hurled glass or bottle had splintered with its contents against the wall. Across the pier glass had been scrawled with a diamond in staggering letters the name "Marie." It seemed that the succession of dwellers in the furnished room had turned in fury—perhaps tempted beyond forbearance by its garish coldness—and wreaked upon it their passions. The furniture was chipped and bruised; the couch, distorted by bursting springs, seemed a horrible monster that had been slain during the stress of some grotesque convulsion. Some more potent upheaval had cloven a great slice from the marble mantel. Each plank in the floor owned its particular cant and shriek as from a separate and individual agony. It seemed incredible that all this malice and injury had been wrought upon the room by those who had called it for a time their home; and yet it may have been the cheated home instinct surviving blindly, the resentful rage at false household gods that had kindled their wrath. A hut that is our own we can sweep and adorn and cherish.

The young tenant in the chair allowed these thoughts to file, soft-shod, through his mind, while there drifted into the room furnished sounds and furnished scents. He heard in one room a tittering and incontinent slack laughter; in others the monologue of a scold, the rattling of dice, a lullaby, and one crying dully; above him a banjo tinkled with spirit. Doors banged somewhere; the elevated trains roared intermittently; a cat yowled miserably upon a back fence. And he breathed the breath of the house—a dank savor rather than a smell—a cold, musty effluvium as from underground vaults mingled with the reeking exhalations of linoleum and mildewed and rotten woodwork.

Then, suddenly, as he rested there, the room was filled with the strong, sweet odor of mignonette. It came as upon a single buffet of wind with such sureness and fragrance and emphasis that it almost seemed a living visitant. And the man cried aloud: "What, dear?" as if he had been called, and sprang up and faced about. The rich odor clung to him and wrapped him around. He reached out his arms for it, all his senses for the time confused and commingled. How could one be peremptorily called by an odor? Surely it must have been a sound. But, was it not the sound that had touched, that had caressed him?

"She has been in this room," he cried, and he sprang to wrest from it a token, for he knew he would recognize the smallest thing that had belonged to her or that she had touched. This enveloping scent of mignonette, the odor that she had loved and made her own—whence came it?

The room had been but carelessly set in order. Scattered upon the flimsy dresser scarf were half a dozen hairpins — those discreet, indistinguishable friends of womankind, feminine of gender, infinite of mood and uncommunicative of tense. These he ignored, conscious of their triumphant lack of identity. Ransacking the drawers of the dresser he came upon a discarded, tiny, ragged handkerchief. He pressed it to his face. It was racy and insolent with heliotrope; he hurled it to the floor. In another drawer he found odd buttons, a theater program, a pawnbroker's card, two lost marshmallows, a book on the divination of dreams. In the last was a woman's black satin hair bow, which halted him, poised between ice and fire. But the black satin hair bow also is femininity's demure, impersonal, common ornament and tells no tales.

And then he traversed the room like a hound on the scent, skimming the walls, considering the corners of the bulging matting on his hands and knees, rummaging mantel and tables, the curtains and hangings, the drunken cabinet in the corner, for a visible sign, unable to perceive that she was there beside, around, against, within, above him, clinging to him, wooing him, calling him so poignantly through the finer senses that even his grosser ones became cognizant of the call. Once again he answered loudly: "Yes, dear!" and turned, wild-eyed, to gaze on vacancy, for he could not yet discern form and color and love and outstretched arms in the odor of mignonette. Oh, God! whence that odor, and since when have odors had a voice to call? Thus he groped.

He burrowed in crevices and corners, and found corks and cigarettes. These he passed in passive contempt. But once he found in a fold of the matting a half-smoked cigar, and this he ground beneath his heel with a green and trenchant oath. He sifted the room from end to end. He found dreary and ignoble small records of many a peripatetic tenant; but of her whom he sought, and who may have lodged there, and whose spirit seemed to hover there, he found no trace.

And then he thought of the housekeeper.

He ran from the haunted room downstairs and to a door that showed a crack of light. She came out to his knock. He smothered his excitement as best he could.

"Will you tell me, madam," he besought her, "who occupied the room I have before I came?"

"Yes, sir. I can tell you again. 'Twas Sprowls and Mooney, as I said. Miss B'retta Sprowls it was in the theaters, but Missis Mooney she was. My house is well known for respectability. The marriage certificate hung, framed, on a nail over—"

"What kind of a lady was Miss Sprowls—in looks, I mean?"

"Why, black-haired, sir, short, and stout, with a comical face. They left a week ago Tuesday."

"And before they occupied it?"

"Why, there was a single gentleman connected with the draying business. He left owing me a week. Before him was Missis Crowder and her two children, that stayed four months; and back of them was old Mr. Doyle, whose sons paid for him. He kept the room six months. That goes back a year, sir, and further I do not remember."

He thanked her and crept back to his room. The room was dead. The essence that had vivified it was gone. The perfume of mignonette had departed. In its place was the old, stale odor of moldy house furniture, of atmosphere in storage.

The ebbing of his hope drained his faith. He sat staring at the yellow, singing gaslight. Soon he walked to the bed and began to tear the sheets into strips. With the blade of his knife he drove them tightly into every crevice around windows and door. When all was snug and taut he turned out the light, turned the gas full on again and laid himself gratefully upon the bed.

It was Mrs. McCool's night to go with the can for beer. So she fetched it and sat with Mrs. Purdy in one of those subterranean retreats where housekeepers foregather and the worm dieth seldom.

"I rented out my third floor, back, this evening," said Mrs. Purdy, across a fine circle of foam. "A young man took it. He went up to bed two hours ago."

"Now, did ye, Mrs. Purdy, ma'am?" said Mrs. McCool, with intense admiration. "You do be a wonder for rentin' rooms of that kind.

And did ye tell him, then?" she concluded in a husky whisper laden with mystery.

"Rooms," said Mrs. Purdy, in her furriest tones, "are furnished for to rent. I did not tell him, Mrs. McCool."

"'Tis right ye are, ma'am; 'tis by renting rooms we kape alive. Ye have the rale sense for business, ma'am. There be many people will rayjict the rentin' of a room if they be tould a suicide has been after dyin' in the bed of it."

"As you say, we has our living to be making," remarked Mrs. Purdy.

"Yis, ma'am, 'tis true. 'Tis just one wake ago this day I helped ye lay out the third floor, back. A pretty slip of a colleen she was to be killin' herself wid the gas—a swate little face she had, Mrs. Purdy, ma'am."

"She'd a-been called handsome, as you say," said Mrs. Purdy, assenting but critical, "but for that mole she had a-growin' by her left eyebrow. Do fill up your glass again, Mrs. McCool."

The Midnight Visitor

By WILLIAM SANFORD

I AWOKE with a subconscious feeling that something was wrong, out of focus. It was pitch dark. Far off in the City Hall tower the great clock began to toll: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. Instinctively my mind followed that distant, methodical gong. It was midnight.

Gradually my eyes became accustomed to the blackness, and I could distinguish the various objects of furniture in the room. But it was the door — *the door!* — that my eyes became fastened upon. The gooseflesh started out on my body. I seemed to feel the hair rising like prickly needles on my scalp. The door was moving slowly; slowly it was being opened by some unseen hand in the room beyond. Inch by inch it opened wider —wider!

Was it a human hand that moved it or some spirit from another world? How foolish! I would jump right up, and—slowly the door began to close again. Had the slight movement I made in bed been heard? A faint, creepy, rustling sound came from the room beyond, unlike that made by any human being. Slowly, slowly the door was closing.

I slipped from the bed and drew a revolver from under my pillow. Just inside that door, where I could reach it by putting in my hand, was the electric switch. I gripped my weapon, my hand shaking in spite of myself, and crept slowly, slowly, toward the other room. I was not afraid, for there were no ghosts—I repeated this to myself—but still that prickly sensation in my scalp continued.

I reached the door. It seemed almost still, yet opened a few inches. Hardly breathing, with my heart standing still, I put my hand through the opening, found the switch on the wall and flooded the room with light.

"Now," I screamed, "I have you!"

And I leapt into the room, brandishing the revolver.

The room was empty.

A soft breeze from the south blew across my face from an open window and rustled drowzily through the curtains. Little by little the door commenced to move again, as the breeze softly played against it—the breeze that was the unseen hand!

Fate Laughed Harshly at this Victim of the Power that Lies in Suggestion

Darkness

By CHARLES HILAN CRAIG

Author of "Damned"

I AM told that coincidence in a story is an element for which editors and readers have a dislike which approaches the sparkling. But if a story be thirty-three and a third per cent each of coincidence, imagination on the part of the principal character, and irony—what then?

Coincidence, which is another name for destiny, played its trump early in the life of Graham Fletcher—in fact before his life began. But it was many years before the stakes were dragged across the game table of life and into the lap of a sneering fate.

It all started when his father, John Fletcher, was carried home after a terrific explosion in which he had lost an arm and the sight of two perfectly good eyes. His young wife fainted with the horror of it; and only a week later Graham Fletcher was born into the world, while on the wall opposite the mother's bed a dread phantom played hide and seek with a tremendous human eye, the half of which was missing. And the years which followed bear mute witness that in that terrible hour a Gargantuan fear was transmitted to the soul of young Fletcher—a fear of blindness.

Too, the daily sight of his stricken father had its influence upon the boy as he passed through his early youth. Blindness! Indelibly there was scared on his brain the fear of it, the horror of it. It was when he was fourteen that a prophecy was made about him.

Now the fortune-teller had given ample proof that she was just as elaborate a liar as the average fortune-teller is supposed to be. She didn't try to tell his fortune in the orthodox way, however. In fact he didn't want her to tell it.

It so happened that young Graham was just as full of the Old Nick as any boy. It seemed human nature to him, then, to hurl pebbles at the horses tied behind the gypsy's wagon. He meant no real harm. But that did not prevent a jagged pebble from striking an eye of one of the horses in such manner as to cause the animal to scream fearfully, while blood spurted from the injured optic.

The wrath of the woman fell upon the boy. Hoarsely she spoke to him in broken English: "For that you pay—pay, see? You blind da hoss; one day you be blind too! Then—you die!"

No doubt she would have done more than prophesy had it not been for the crowd near at hand. But it was more than enough. She had set her mark upon the soul of young Graham Fletcher. He would not forget. And so was another coincidence born—almost an inexcusable one. . . .

THE years passed by. Deeper and deeper into the being of Graham Fletcher pushed that phantom of unrest. He had gone home crying after

the incident with the fortune-teller, but he was never to forget. It was shortly after that that his imagination began to work overtime.

He had bad dreams. That was the first development. In these dreams he saw a hideous old hag with vulpine features, and hawklike claws striving to reach his face—his eyes. Bad dreams at night, if continued, easily give rise to day dreams. Now, day dreams are supposed to be pleasant. They are—if you sleep well. But Graham Fletcher didn't, and so he began to "see things" even in the day time.

Many things happened which increased his fear. There was the time a hard-bodied little bug got into his eye. It sickened him, but his terror overcame even the feeling of nausea. A life in utter dark such as that his father was leading stared him in the face. He was afraid.

Of course there had been other incidents. Once he had tried to play football. A rough tackle which resulted in a black eye put the taboo upon that forever. Then there was the incident of the automobile race when a driver ran through the fence and a splinter of board struck Fletcher in the face, breaking his glasses and cutting a deep gash under the left eye. The whole world, it would seem, was conspiring to do away with the sight of Graham Fletcher. Thereafter he never attended the races and, though he needed spectacles, he never wore them.

Fletcher, of course, had his recurrent nightmare. Strange to relate, the old gipsy woman failed to appear again. Instead it was something intangible, yet quite real, which oppressed him. The change made it all the more certain that he was doomed. He never could figure out his illusion satisfactorily. Sometimes he seemed to be crushed under a weight that all the power in the world could not move. Again it seemed that he was being dropped through infinite space. Always, though, there was the sense of his eyes being dragged out of him. At first his awakenings would be with tears. Then as he grew older he would awake in a state of cold, clammy sweat. After the dream there was little sleep for him again the same night. It was when he was nineteen that he *felt* claws on his eyes. Thereafter he left the light burning in his room when he went to bed.

It was only natural that Fletcher should try to find things to keep him occupied so that he would have no time to think of his illusions. He kept busy—but the phantoms continued to come. He welcomed with avidity the chance to go into the north woods for a short stay with two friends.

For a time Fletcher was so busily engaged in the hunt that he forgot his trouble. All would have gone well, perhaps, had he not been left alone that night in the cabin.

Jones and Gordon tramped over to the station together to get supplies. They promised to be back before dark, and Fletcher had no premonition of impending disaster. During the afternoon he hiked through the woods and later wrote several letters. It was when the shadows began to become flickery that Graham Fletcher felt a chill as of a bitter cold creep through him. Twilight fell. The black shadow among the trees had arms now, arms that groped for him. Blind arms they were. Blind! He fled to the safety of the cabin.

For a few minutes the light gave him comfort. Then he saw the shadows in the cabin. Shadows that moved!

He jerked open the cupboard and took down a flat bottle.

He tasted the liquid—drank. He tried to read, but the shadows kept

creeping up one side of the page. The shadows! Sometimes they seemed to form claws—claws that reached for his eyes.

He drank again. And again. Then he decided that his partners had stayed over at the station, so he went to bed, leaving the light burning on the table. He put the flashlight near him.

His thoughts cast back over other days. He kept his mind from the specter and finally fell asleep. He dreamed. This time a new trouble beset him. That bottle! Whisky? He had read of a number of deaths resulting from the drinking of wood alcohol in liquor. Now— He tossed feverishly, and after a while went to sleep again.

The tall, old-fashioned clock to which he had paid scant attention awakened him when it struck seven. He lay for a moment thinking. Seven. The sun would be up, and—

Blackness was like a pall about him. It was thick, hideous. He could almost feel it, hear it, taste it. Blackness! Could it be that he had heard wrong—that it was still night? No! Where the lamp had been left burning on the table he could see no light! A cry of agonized dismay burst from his lips. His senses reeled—but by a powerful effort of his will he was able to reach for the flashlight. Full into his eyes he held it for a long minute. There was no answering glow.

"God!" he said.

Ah! Fool that you are, Graham Fletcher, had you but looked at the oil in the lamp you would have realized that it would not burn more than an hour; and did you not throw away the useless battery in the flashlight yourself? Blind? You are not blind, Graham Fletcher, but you do not know this. You are moaning softly as you reach for the gun beside your bed; it is but the work of a moment to put the end of the barrel in your mouth and push the trigger with your toe. There! Destiny has raked the table clean once more.

Jones and Gordon were appalled when they saw the body of the suicide stretched out on the floor. No possible motive made itself apparent to them.

I SUGGESTED that this was a story of coincidence. There is but one thing more. It is for the friends to glance at the clock, *note that it is five hours fast,* and by some hocus pocus decide at what hour their friend took his own life. But they don't look—and therein is the irony. The clock will tick merrily on till it has run down.

The wind is high, the wind is loud,
It bends the blackthorn tree;
The blast has tossed my bones about
This night most wearily.
—*Old Ballad.*

HIGH on the spur of the Blackdown Hills, which break into the East Devon valleys as promontories run into the sea, lies the mighty fortress of Hembury. Its steep sides are trenched house-deep, and its stout bases are untenanted save by the fox and the badger, and other beasts that burrow in the brushwood slopes, living their lives untroubled any longer by the howl of the wolf or the grunt of the bear. The whole region is haunted by the spirits of men who met their death by the sudden spear or the unseen arrow. Shaggy Damnonians here grappled with the mail-clad legionaries, and the English of King Alfred's service, harassed from two seas, awaited the bands of brown Danes marching from their ships on the pebbles at East Budleigh up the sunny Otter Valley.

If you stand on the highest escarpment when the sun has set between the distant cliffs it will be yours to feel utter loneliness. If you have come from the sweet hill-encircled pastures of Dunkeswell, where the ruffled waters wash the abbey walls, you will feel still more deeply the solitude that is broken only by the rustling of prowling beasts and of their prey, and by the flapping of the startled stock-doves' wings. All around the view is vast and the spaciousness unrelieved by any homely sight or sound. The very lane you have traversed is moss-grown and invaded by furze and the unchecked bramble. On the open heath behind the ancient camp stand here and there shattered trunks of blasted trees, wisht-looking and forbidden, forsaken even by the faithful lichen.

ONE moonlight night, in the heyday of Napoleon, terror held sway on the heath; not the ghostliness of past memories, but the dire presence of death and its compeer madness. A human voice was added to the nocturnal whisperings and wailings, a voice that rose and fell in unmeasured cadence, but earnest and impassioned.

From a clump of whortleberries and ling bushes in the center of the heath there rose a weird growth, a fantastic tree whose branches were spread out as it were in dumb appeal to the cold night. At the foot of the

tree, leaning against its gray, barkless trunk, could be seen the huddled form of an old woman. And the tree, though dead and barren of leaf and berry, bore a gruesome fruit. For it was a gallows-tree and its heavy fruit was the woman's son.

All was silent for a while, save for the gentle sough of a rising wind. A nightjar flew past the tree, then squatted down on the short turf in the greenish glamor; from time to time it fluttered to another place and settled almost within reach of the twain, as though it desired companionship. A bushy-tailed stoat stalked up without a sound, and pressed its lithe body to the earth in the shadow of a sedge-cluster, with eyes fixed on the brown bird. From under Orion a billowy cloud moved athwart the moon, and a cold breeze hastened in the track of the sudden darkness that followed. There was a rattle of chains: the nightjar flew off in rapid swerves and the stoat sat up, balancing his swaying body on his forepaws, and hissing in anger. The old woman pulled herself together as though startled; she shuddered and rubbed her hands together and began to sing:

"A wind came out from No Man's land
And shivered across the corn.
For gossip's sake I'd die to-night
And be in hell to-morn.

"Be 'ee cold, sonny? Sure, I be thinking of 'ee hard, that I be."

She rose and took from her shoulders a coarse holland wrap and reaching up tried to throw it round her dead son's neck. Twice she failed and the third time the end of the wrap swung round the head and came to hand. Then she folded it inside his coat, crooning and mumbling the while. She clasped him in her arms, and felt the cold hands pinioned behind his back.

"Wattie, my boy, come home. 'Tis ower lonesome on the heath; and I've made your bed up nice and cozy. A whole week I've been waiting for you. Will 'ee come? The sheriff's gone and all his men, and Martin Hawk'll never know you in this yere collar and chains."

She let him go and looked up. But the dead man only swung to and fro, round and round, with his ghastly face awry.

"Don't smile so, sonny, else you'm sure to catch the teethache. Lord! but he've got the evil eye on him!" She caught sight of the orbless depth where the raven had fed early that morning. A few flakes of snow settled on her drab homespun cloak, and still the wind rose.

" 'Tis the northeaster afoot. I knawed it was a-coming when I seed all they lapwings in Farmer Summerhayes' field."

She walked slowly three times round the tree in the course of the moon. Then she looked up at the fleeting clouds a while and said:

"Bain't 'ee coming to lonely mother? Be 'ee afeard? Nay, but 'tis a bitter shame for you to be a coward heart. Do 'ee mind that night off Straight Point when the Blackamoor pirates found him and Matthew and you a-sleeping in the ketch, an' he fought for his boys till they killed him, but you swam away to Sandy Cove and left young Matthew to go for a slave? Do 'ee mind how I cried and thee said thee'd bide by me and take care of your broken-hearted mother? And then the devil comes into your heart and you goes a-thieving with Martin Hawk. Why did 'ee trust to Martin? Your poor old mother would never ha' sold you for sheriff's gold."

A flaw of wind swung the body, and the gyves clanked again. A terrified hare scudded by blindly.

"But never fear—he shall come to you soon and bear you company, that he shall. Do 'ee wait but a tiny while, sonny, and Martin Hawk shall

swing from t'other bough a-singing so blithe. Fetch him, my boy, call him, hunt him from his lair this very night, and the stars o' heaven shall watch ye both in your sleep."

And the old woman hastened away across the narrow neck of land into the ancient camp, and down the hidden waterway of the old warriors, looking neither to right nor to left.

2

Oh ho, how they march,
Making sounds as they tread;
Ho-ho, how they laugh,
Going down to the dead.
—*The Dead March.*

THREE miles to the southward of the hill camp lies the modern village of Broad Hembury. It consists of a score or so of snugly thatched farmhouses and cottages, approached by deep Devon lanes on three sides, and on the fourth by an avenue of the tallest elms, a manorial drive leading to the old hall. Here the stranger moves in a feudal atmosphere: the high walls and the lofty rook-thronged park trees produce a sense of insignificance in one who is less than an honored guest; and the villagers themselves are medieval, not only in their dependence, but in their very speech and movements.

On this night the village lay sheltered from the cold winds that blew on the heights above, and lights were burning dimly behind the small lattice windows. Indoors the frugal evening meal was still on the tables of one and another of the houses, and the laboring folk were settling down for the night. In one cottage only, no light burned, for the widow Gregory had been out since early afternoon, and her log fire had long since died out. No sound was to be heard but the moaning of the wind in the far tops of the trees, and the occasional murmur of the warmly stalled cattle.

On a sudden this stillness was broken by the sound of a gun. Now it happened that Frank Janes, the stable-boy at Squire Coleridge's, was out in the linhay at that moment, and his sharp ears caught the unusual sound. A gunshot in the park at that hour meant something wrong, so he ran in to tell the master. The young guardsman seized a fowling-piece and gave a bludgeon to the boy, and they started off for the park. They had not crossed the flower beds in front of the hall before they heard another shot, followed by a sharp cry.

" 'Tis Bob Gamlin, of a surety, sir, and him in trouble."

They raced along under the grove of walnut and chestnut trees until they reached the edge of the wildfowl pond, and there in a momentary burst of moonlight they found the keeper lying doubled up with his piece beside him.

"God! Bob, whatever's up wi' 'ce? I knawed your voice right enough."

The man looked up but could not speak: he opened his mouth, but something seemed to be choking him.

"Run back at once and fetch Horniball and Furze and Eno and bring a stretcher, quick," said the young officer.

When the boy had gone he bent down over the keeper and spoke kindly to him. The man opened his eyes again and said in a whisper:

" 'Tis Martin Hawk, sir, a-poaching: I did nearly have him, though." Then came a gush of blood and he fell back in a stupor.

The young squire raised him gently in his arms and held him upright until the farmhands came, a ghostly procession with horn lanterns, tramping heavily through the lush leaf-strown grass. The dying man was borne carefully into the stable room, and by that time all the village was gathered. Awestruck women and muttering men stood respectfully aside as

the old squire came out bareheaded and gave his orders. Jan Searle was to speed to Honiton for a doctor and the constable, and the men of the village were to meet at daylight to hunt the outlaw.

The keeper never spoke again, and long before Jan Searle had covered the six miles to Honiton was beyond need of earthly help. He lay in one of the stable rooms, and two motherly village dames had led his swooning wife Eunice home and were trying in vain to comfort her. The knot of men moved out of the manor gates and gathered anew on the green, where snow-white geese stirred uneasily in their sleep by slowly moving water. Anger and threats came from their midst, but all their speech was in subdued tones, for death, that was but a rare visitor in their community, had shown his face twice in a week. In their excitement they did not notice, until she was close to them, a woman who walked as though in a dream. Her cloak was thrown back from her head and her silvery hair was all disheveled and lying on her shoulders; her hands were torn by the brambles and the gorse, and her homespun skirt was heavy with dew and the drip from the trees. All voices were suddenly hushed, and it was Robin Furze who broke the silence.

" 'Tis Widow Gregory, for certain," he said. "Poor saul, us must mind her trouble too, boys. Tomorrow must be his last day."

The old woman stopped in their midst: though she turned to them there was a far-away look in her eyes and no man felt that she was speaking to him.

"There be a lost hound that shall lose his life this very night. See you this mark on my forehead? That is the blow he gave me when I met him and cursed him on the hill-road but an hour ago. This night, I told him, he shall pay back the debt of life he owes my son; he cannot escape, my boy shall draw him yonder. By the cruel eye of the hawk, by the sharp teeth of the fitchet, by the foul blood of the vampire I curse him: by the bones of his father, by his mother's breast, by his children's lips I curse him. For his wicked life, for the men he has falsely betrayed, for the women he has fordone, to his soul's everlasting doom I curse him, and may the Lord forgive me!"

She stayed her speech and her arms fell exhausted by her side. She bowed her head and walked away toward the gloom of the park wall. All at once she turned sharply and said:

"This night, men, you will find him by the cross-tree on the heath: I have sent my Wattie for him, and there's no power can hold him back. Hark, I hear my lad a-calling: 'Martin, Martin!' He is a-cold and lonesome, but he shall have gay company this night."

And on their startled ears fell the mournful cry of some night bird, perchance in its death agony.

MEANTIME the guilty man was hastening up the long slope of the lane which ran eastward and gave the shortest cut to Honiton. It was a miry track, sunk deep between green banks, and on such a night as this was little less than a sky-roofed tunnel. Why he was climbing this road he did not know: it was as though some force outside his own will were directing him. His clothes were blood-stained and he knew he must avoid the busier haunts of men. One way he dare not take, and that was over the heath where his comrade Gregory, the victim of his treachery, was swinging in the storm. How he longed to be out of the close valley! And yet not for the world would he turn that fatal way.

After half an hour's rough going the lane opened into a small square

with three other ways leading out of it. Here he would rest for a few minutes; he stood at a broken field-gate and let the breeze he had longed for fan his brow. A blackbird rustled in the bare hedge branches; up in the hills the wind moaned through the gullies, and every now and then came whirls of wet snow that melted as soon as it reached earth. He was just thinking of moving when the dull tramp of a galloping horse struck his ears. He was over the gate in a twinkling and had wriggled himself into a hiding place behind the hedge. As a precaution he hastily put a fresh cap on his musket and held it ready. The sound grew louder and louder, then the gallop slackened and changed into a heavy walk; the slope of the road was too much for the horse.

A sudden idea came into Hawk's mind. Why should not that horse be his for a time, whoever the owner might be now? With a good horse and his knowledge of the west country paths, he might, by traveling o' nights, reach the Black Mountains of Wales in a week's time, hiding his tracks as he went, and then he would be safe. After all, Devon was too hot for him any longer, and what was life to a man who dare not face the daylight? The idea became a hope and a determination: that horse he would have, even at the cost of another life.

He recognized the animal and its rider as soon as they came forth into the cross-ways. Just as they passed the gate he pointed his musket at Searle and fired pointblank. There was a snap, a curse from the murderer, a plunge by the startled horse, and a laugh of contempt as man and beast dashed into the Honiton turning, soon to be out of range. The wonderful thing had happened that for the first time in his life Martin Hawk had forgotten to load his piece.

He raved as though out of his senses, dashed his gun to the ground, and felt his sense of self-control and security leaving him. Again there came the sure feeling that a power outside himself had him in leash. He must get away with all speed. But whither could he fly? The road back to the village and that forward to Honiton he dare not try: that leading down the Otter Valley to the sea was no good; daylight would show him up on the downs and a price was on his head in the ports. So it came about that he turned with dread into the very road he shunned the most, that leading up to the hill-fort and the heath, where was a sight it would mean madness to face. The air grew colder and a storm passed over the land as he mounted against his will. A beacon light flared into sight on a hill away beyond Exeter, and a vision of dragoons and the prison yard flashed into his mind. He must plunge into the darkness of the hills and shut out all light from far and near.

All at once he bethought him of an old hut under the eastern slope of the hill, which had formerly been a haunt of his when benighted or in hiding. He swung to the right through the thick growth of brushwood, and with difficulty made his way along the base of the mountain mass of the fort. It was painful work, even for an experienced woodsman, to force his way through the overgrown tangle, and he felt the briars tearing his clothes and his flesh as he struggled pantingly through. With old instinct he replaced the parted twigs and so covered his track as far as possible. The night was dark now, and the moon no longer showed its face, but there was a dull glare overhead, marking the sky against looming masses of earth and forest around him. He was on familiar ground now, and his course became less arduous.

As he approached his old den he looked carefully for signs of any recent visitants, man or beast, but the earth was untrodden and the overgrowth undisturbed. The hut was at the end of a tiny dingle filled with tall stems of figwort and sedges. It was a tumble-down structure, partly built of banked turf and partly scooped out of the hillside. A rotting beam crossed the entrance and a strong shutter served as door.

Martin Hawk came into the dingle in sorry state. The sweat ran down his haggard face, and he trembled with a fright he had never known before. He pushed back the shutter and entered the narrow portal. After several attempts he struck a light on his tinder box and placed the stump of a dip in a hollow in the wall where its reflection would serve to light the interior dimly without betraying him. A huge toad was squatting in a corner, and he scraped the ugly thing out with his foot without hurting it. A smell of cold ferns filled the hut, but he had a shelter against wind and rain. He went out and pulled a big armful of sedge, which he laid on the damp bank of turf that served him for a couch. It was of no avail his trying to light a fire from the moldy embers and wet kindling, so he pressed the bar into place across the shutter, lighted his pipe, and sat down to clean his gun. After a while, overcome with weariness, he lay down to sleep. He had watched the night before and had not been under a roof for three days. His sleep was deep and heavy as though he lay in a dungeon far underground; he heard neither the sound of creeping things nor the careering gusts of wind.

3

For an outlawe, this is the lawe, that men
hyme take and binde
Wythout pytee, hanged for to bee, and
waver with the wynde.
—*The Nut-Brown Maid.*

A HEAVY thundering at the door broke through the depths of the stillness.

The sleeper's heart suddenly stopped beating and as suddenly raced on with double force. He dared not speak or move and his limbs were as ice.

Again a loud banging on the shutter, which shook but stood its ground.

A shudder passed over the outlaw, and with a superhuman effort a pitiful groan was forced from his lips.

Then a voice he knew too well froze his blood:

" 'Tis I, Martin: open the door and let your comrade in."

Martin uttered a smothered oath.

"Let me bide," he shouted, "or I'll blow ye to hell!" and he reached for his gun.

"Don't 'ee knaw me, Martin? 'Tis Wat Gregory."

" 'Tis a devil's trick: I knawed his voice better'n that: be off, I tell 'ee."

"Nay, but 'tis I sure enough, Martin: the gibbet rope be a-choking me, else would 'ee hear me plain."

Martin groaned.

"I be turble cold, Martin; for a seven-night the hail and rain have fallen on my hair, and they shackles hurt painful. Let me in and I'll be quiet along of 'ee."

There was a dead silence.

"Sure I've not troubled 'ee before, Martin; and you made a good fire and a warm bed the night I got the gold for 'ee."

No answer.

"Why should I swing in they cruel chains all night, Martin, when you and I be rich men? I seed 'ee hide the gold; 'tis mine too. Do 'ee hear, Martin Hawk?"

There was no sound but the breathing of the sleeping woods.

A LOUD crash, and the bar and the shutter fell in. At that moment Martin fired his gun into the doorway, and by the flash in the pan saw his death approaching.

The dead man muttered evil words as he strode through the broken door. He stepped across to the untended hearth in his clanking shackles, and all this the murderer saw in an unearthly light. He drew back into a nook in the sodden earth wall, and could not pull his eyes from that awful blue-white face with the rusty iron band across its brow.

"What be 'ee shrinking for, Martin? Be 'ee feared of my face, boy? 'Tis wisht-looking, may be: but 'tis the rope done it. Look 'ee, 'tis very tight, and I bain't a free man to loose the damned thing."

The lank body turned round and showed the manacled hands and swollen fingers.

"Do 'ee knaw they ropes, Martin? They be the gift of a traitor." And the dead man turned a ghastly face with one lack-luster eye upon the trembling robber.

"But I bain't a-gwine to be hard on 'ee, friend, now you and me's going to stick to each other for always."

Martin struggled violently to find words.

"Let me go!" he screamed. If he could only pass that specter and reach the open air he would gladly flee to justice himself—even to Honiton or Ottery, where they were ready to tear him in pieces. The most revengeful of living foes would be less hateful to him than his ghostly victim.

But the trance had stupefied his will and he could not stir from his couch.

The dead man spoke again.

"Come with me, Martin. I'll not remember that ye shut the door in my face this night. Nay, I'll be kind to 'ee, and the raven that keeps watch over me shall welcome 'ee as my guest."

The dead man made a loop of his left arm and leaned over his comrade.

"Do 'ee take my arm, Martin: 'tis a stiff climb for a weary man."

And all against his will Martin arose and passed his arm through the dead man's, a cold shudder running over his fevered wrist.

Together they passed out into the night. They threaded the tangled undergrowth as easily as though it were a sunny meadow. The dead man's head swung from side to side and his shackles rattled monotonously step after step. They breasted the rampart of the fort and descended into the first deep dike, and marched along in silence where the sleepy Parthian sentinels had long ago watched. Wall after wall they scaled, and ditch after ditch they crossed until they stood on the grass-grown outlook tower at the highest point. The wind blew strongly, but the dead man only quickened his pace. They crossed the broad camping place, the abode of countless moldwarps, and at last came out on to the ling-clad heath. How the time flew! In five minutes it seemed to Martin they were at the fatal spot. He looked with wild eyes upon the blasted tree stumps, and the dread blackthorn gallows took sudden shape against the lurid sky, with its two arms a-calling.

The dead man gave a lurch and shook himself free. He turned his sunken face and said:

"Now us'll rest, Martin; all alone here. Us that was brothers in foul life shall be brothers in sweet death. 'Tis a friendly tree to the hawk and the shrike and such as us be. Look, man; here be a rope for 'ee."

And he seized the noose with his teeth and dropped it over his companion's head. Martin's agony reached its climax as he felt the hideous touch of the dead man's head against his cheek! But he could not utter a word.

"What be 'ee trembling for, man? 'Tis but a short struggle, then 'tis

over. Come, be brotherly, and I'll help 'ee up on my shoulders."

Then for the first time the murderer tried to pray: prayed for help for his own soul. The death-sweat was on his brow.

And suddenly he woke from the awful trance which, come from within or from without, had held him powerless to resist the tug of the vision that was ever in his brain. He little knew what he had undergone when he awoke.

"Ah," thought he, " 'twas a dream of hell!" He shivered in the night air.

But what was that so tight around his throat after all? And what was that that dangled at his side?

Ah, horror! The dead thing was there still, leering down at him with drawn face.

A light blazed up before his startled eyes. It was a pine torch, and by its fitful smoky light he saw a ring of men standing at ten paces around the crosstree. He heard a voice—how welcome it was to hear a living voice!

"That's for my brother Jake."

A shot rang out, and with a sharp sting his arm fell to his side. He was now wide awake and the physical pain came even as a relief after his torture of mind.

"And that's for Kate, my sister;" it was Robin Furze's voice. This time the sting was in his left shoulder. Another voice rang clear: "That'll do, man. Us baint butchers." And the figures approached him in the glare, but they did not touch him.

"Be ye ready, chaps?"

"Aye, aye."

"Then heave, oh, heave!"

Martin Hawk felt the grip on his throat tighten horribly, and the last thing he saw was the yellow face of his dead comrade coming nearer, nearer, nearer.

The group of villagers mounted their horses and rode off in silence. As they turned into the steep waterway leading to the valley Jan Searle whispered to Farmer Summerhayes:

"Did 'ee hear a woman laughing just now?"

"No, boy, 'twas a heron in the mere."

In the October WEIRD TALES—

BAD MEDICINE

By ALANSON SKINNER

A bizarre tale of Indian witchcraft

On Sale at All News Stands September First

An Eery Little Story Is This Banshee Tale

ITSELF

By SEABURY QUINN

Author of "Servants of Satan," "The Phantom Farmhouse," etc.

"NO," Dr. Applegate said reflectingly, "I'm not at all sure we can refer everything to science for an explanation, at least, not to science as we know it."

Renouard, the demonstrator of anatomy, gave his diminutive beard a quick, nervous tug and smiled like an amiable Mephistopheles. "Ah, yes," he mocked, " 'In earth and sky and sea, strange things there be,' eh? Can you give us any sign, doctor?"

Applegate drew thoughtfully at his cigar. "I wouldn't be too anxious for a sign, if I were you, Renouard," he warned. "Patrick O'Loughlin wanted a sign, and got one.

"It was last spring that O'Loughlin came down with a touch of influenza. Nothing serious; just a case for careful diet and bed-rest treatment; but the family wanted a nurse, so I got them Miss Sandler. Wonderful girl, Sarah Sandler. None better. If she were on night duty and the devil himself came into the sick room, she'd tell him to make as little noise as possible when he put his pitchfork behind the door, and step softly, lest he wake her patient.

"I dropped in to see O'Loughlin toward the end of the week and found him lying on his back, trying to stare a spot of sunlight off the ceiling.

" 'How are you, Pat?' I asked when he took no more notice of me than if I'd not come in. 'Let's see the chart. Ah, fine; you'll be up and attending to business by this time next week.'

" 'No, I won't, doctor,' he answered in a hollow voice. 'I'll never get out of this bed till Mike Costello comes to dress me for my funeral.'

" 'Rats!' I answered. 'You're healthy as a herd of elephants, O'Loughlin. A little touch of flu won't have any more effect on you than a drink of liquor. Why, your chart shows a steady decline in temperature. You're as good as recovered this minute, man.'

" 'No, doctor,' he replied with the stubbornness only an Irishman can show. 'I'm a doomed man; I've had the sign.'

" 'Sign?' I repeated testily. 'What d'ye mean?'

" 'The comb sign, sir,' he replied. 'Mary Ann had it before she went, and go she did, spite of all you could do to keep her.'

" 'Your daughter had an aggravated case of interstitial nephritis,—it's particularly deadly in the young,' I told him. 'We caught the disease too late, and no power on earth could have saved her. You're a husky man, sound as a trivet, except for a touch of flu—'

" 'She had the sign, and she went, doctor,' he interrupted doggedly, 'and I've had it, and *I'll* go, too. It's no use your trying to save me; I'm going.'

" 'What do you mean?' I asked, seating myself on the bedside. When a patient gets in such a frame of mind the doctor has to think fast, if he doesn't want to lose another case.

" 'It came to us three months before Mary Ann died,' he answered. 'There was a crowd of young people at the house, and 'long toward midnight someone suggested they try some table-tipping. I didn't want to interfere with their fun; but I didn't like it. Table-tipping and such like things aren't good for the soul, sir, as any man from the old country can tell you.

" 'Well, sir, they all sat down to the little table in the hall, and put their hands on it, little fingers touching, so as to make a complete circle, and one of the young men called out, "Are there any spirits here tonight? If there are, let them answer our questions. One rap on the table means *a*, two, *b*, and so on through the alphabet. Now, then, are there any spirits here tonight?"

" 'Dr. Applegate, you can believe it or not; but that table—a brand-new piece of furniture it was—began to quiver like a mettlesome horse when something startles him, and all 'round its edge there started a series of rappings as though someone was marching about it beating a tattoo with a pair of drumsticks.

" 'Then I lost my temper, for I don't hold with that sort o' thing, and I said, "Whoever's knocking on that table, quit it. I won't have it in my house."

" 'The young folks jumped up from their chairs, doctor, but the drumming kept up, and Mary Ann suddenly cried out, "Why, father, they're calling for *you!* Hear the rappings? 'Patrick O'Loughlin; Patrick O'Loughlin,' is what they're spelling."

" 'And so they were. "Who calls?" I wanted to know, and the rappings stopped like a drum corps' music when the drum major brings down his baton.

" ' "Who calls?" I asked again, and the thing spelled out the answer: "Itself."

" 'You're not Irish, doctor, and you most likely don't know what that word meant to an Irishman. Over in the old country we have fairy folk and such like, and those we call the little good people, though the holy saints know they're not good at all. But we call 'em good lest they hear our real opinion of 'em and steal away our children or burn our homes over our heads. But bad and troublesome as the little good people are, they're holy angels compared to some o' the things that hover 'round in the air. And these terrible things, the very sight or sound of which means death, we don't name at all, though we know their names well enough. We refer to 'em by the use of a pronoun, and the worst of 'em all we call simply "themselves."

" ' "And what does Itself want with Patrick O'Loughlin?" I asked, though my breath was coming so fast in my throat it near choked the speech from my lips.

" 'And it answered me and said, "Patrick O'Loughlin, you have called to me and here I am. Never, while there's a man or woman of your blood in this new land will I desert you. You shall know when Death and I are near by the movements of the comb."

"I could have laughed in the man's face. Who but an Irishman could have dreamed such a fantastic story? Table-tipping, a message from an old-world fairy, delivered by rappings on a piece of Grand Rapids furniture!

" 'You're crazy, Pat,' I told him.

" 'Am I, indeed, doctor?' he answered seriously. 'Then listen to this: Never a word more could we get from the table after that one message had been delivered, and what the night-thing meant by "the movements of the comb" was more than any of us could imagine.

" 'But you recall well enough when Mary Ann was taken sick. You remember how she seemed so much bet-

ter just the day before she died? Well, sir, the very night the poor lamb went away I went a-tiptoe into her room to kiss her good-night, and she was lying in bed, staring at me with her big blue eyes like a little child lost in the woods. "Did you put my comb on the bed, daddy?" she asked as I came into the room.

"'"Comb, child? What comb?" I asked, curious to know what she meant.

"'"My big comb, there," she says, and points to the foot of the bed where, lying on the folded comfort, was the big Spanish tortoise-shell comb her Uncle Timothy, who was a sea captain in the Lamport and Holt service, had brought her from Barcelona for a gift on her fifteenth birthday. She always kept the trinket in a blue velvet case on her dressing table, and most of the time the case was locked, for you never can tell when a servant will pick up a piece of bric-a-brac like that and make off with it.

"'"It was in the case this morning, I'm sure," she told me, "for Miss Jarvis, the nurse, was admiring it then; but just now I chanced to look at the foot of the bed, and there it was, shining in the electric light more beautifully than I'd ever seen it glisten before."

"'"It must have got put there by mistake, child," I told her as I picked the thing up and restored it to its case; but there was a feeling of dread running through me as I spoke, for I recalled the message I'd had.

"'That very morning the angel came for her, doctor. You yourself remember how we called you from your bed past midnight, and how her little white soul had gone to heaven before you could get here?'

"'Yes; I remember, Pat,' I answered soothingly, 'but what has all this to do with your getting well?'

"'Just this, doctor,' he replied earnestly. 'Mary Ann's room has been left untouched, save for the necessary cleaning, since the day we took her from it, and the comb has always lain in its velvet case on her dressing table, exactly as I put it the night she died. Last night, sir, as I was lying here, trying to sleep, and not able to for the way my thoughts kept turning on Mary Ann, I felt a soft thump on the foot of my bed, as though a cat had leaped up there. Dr. Applegate, sir, it was my daughter's comb lying there, though the Holy Mother herself only knows how it came down a flight of stairs and through two closed doors to get there.

"'I've had the sign, doctor. You mean well, and your medicine's as good as any; but there's nothing you can do. 'Tis a priest I need to doctor my sinful soul, not a medical man to patch my body up, sir.'

"'H'm, where is this comb?' I asked.

"'Upstairs, in Mary Ann's room,' he answered.

"'Well, then, Patrick,' I told him, 'here's where we play a Yankee trick on this old-country goblin of yours. I'm going to take that comb home with me, and lock it in my office safe, and if "Itself" comes snooping around my place I'll give him a dose of medicine that'll send him back to Ireland by the non-stop route.'

"He grinned wanly at my suggestion as he answered, 'All right, doctor, do as you please, but it's no use. I've had the sign and nothing earthly can help me now.'

"HALF an hour later I left the O'Loughlin house, the blue velvet case containing the carved tortoise-shell comb under my arm. I locked the thing securely in my wall safe, attended to my office calls, ate dinner and went to the club for a rubber of bridge.

"It must have been just past midnight when I got back to the house, for the policeman on our beat was putting in his call at the patrol box

across the street as I unlocked my front door.

"The shrilling of my telephone bell greeted me as I stepped from the vestibule. 'Hello?' I called.

" 'This is Miss Sandler, Dr. Applegate,' a voice came over the wire. 'Mr. O'Loughlin has died. Shall I—'

" 'I'll be right over,' I said.

" 'HE DIED while I was out of the room, doctor,' the nurse told me. 'I made sure Mr. O'Loughlin was sleeping easily before I slipped downstairs at midnight to pour myself a cup of coffee—I was gone less than five minutes by my wrist watch. When I came back he seemed still sleeping, but a second look told me he'd never wake again in this world.'

"She busied herself with the bottles on the bedside table a minute, then looked up at me, almost diffidently. 'Did Mr. O'Loughlin say anything to you about a comb this afternoon?'

" 'Yes, he said something about a sign, and as it was preying on his mind, I took the thing home with me.'

" 'You *did*?' she replied incredulously.

" 'Yes; why?'

" 'Why—why,' she seemed at a loss for words—'you're sure you took that comb home with you, doctor?'

" 'Of course I'm sure,' I answered.

" 'Well, sir, when I came back from drinking my coffee—just after I noticed Mr. O'Loughlin had gone—I happened to look down on the foot of the bed, and—and I saw this there.' She lifted a cushion from the couch and produced the exact duplicate of the comb I'd taken from O'Loughlin's house that afternoon.

" 'I've been nursing for nearly ten years, doctor,' she went on,—'two years in the army during the war—and I didn't think anything could unstring my nerves; but—well, Mr. O'Loughlin told me about this comb tonight, and I thought it was funny—then. Now I don't know what to think. It gives me the creeps.'

" 'You're not the only one who has the creeps,' I told her as I took the comb. "Call Costello's undertaking establishment and tell them I'll have the death certificate ready when they get here.'

"WHEN we'd completed the clerical details I drove Miss Sandler to her apartment, then hustled back to my office. 'Now we'll see what's what,' I promised myself as I took from my pocket the comb the nurse had found on O'Loughlin's death bed and began to turn the knob of my safe.

"My fingers seemed all thumbs and my hand shook in spite of myself. I laid the comb on the corner of my desk, grasped the safe knob in both hands, and spun the combination.

"There was the blue velvet case, exactly as I had placed it in the safe ten hours earlier. I fairly snatched it open in my eagerness. In its setting of white satin, the tortoise-shell comb lay glistening in the light.

" 'That settles that,' I murmured: 'now for the other one.' I turned to the desk, then blinked in stupefaction. The comb I'd laid there two minutes before was gone.

"High and low, over every inch of my office, I searched for that bit of feminine frippery like the woman in the parable hunting her lost piece of silver. Daylight was coming through the office windows before I gave up.

"Explain it any way you will, or don't explain it at all. I can swear I locked up one physical, tangible comb in my safe that afternoon; Miss Sandler found exactly the same comb on the bed beside O'Loughlin's body, and I will take oath that I carried that very comb home with me. But from the moment I turned my back on it to open my safe, I never saw that second comb again."

Something Besides Friendship Prompted Chung Wo-lung's Fiendish Gift to Tommy Kee

The Flying Halfback

By ROBERT S. CARR

Author of "The Composite Brain"

CHUNG WO-LUNG was meditating, his bland Celestial face giving no hint as to the nature of his thoughts. As the lengthening shadows darkened his little room, his heavy-lidded almond eyes slowly narrowed till they became thin slits of windows through which the leaping flames of the seething brain within occasionally gleamed with a startling fierceness and intensity. By degrees the lofty-browed, intelligent, philosophical face of the Chinese scientist lost its appearance of a polite, well-bred mask and reverted to the horribly sinister countenance of a cruel, shrewd fighting man of Old China, an Oriental lover who would tolerate no rival.

His thoughts went back to a not-long-gone night, the night he had asked old Fu Chan-sing for his daughter's hand in marriage. The old Chinese diplomat had been pleased with his offer, this chance of family relationship with so honored and learned a man, acclaimed by some the greatest living inventor and scientist in the world.

At that moment Toy Sing, the maiden in question, had entered with (may the Seventh Curse of Confucious fall upon him! thought Chung) Tommy Kee.

How Chung Wo-lung hated Tommy Kee! He hated him for his mighty stature, for his remarkably handsome yet vividly Oriental face, but most of all for his fame as a football player. Tommy Kee, whom the sports writers hailed as the most phenomenal halfback in the history of football; Tommy Kee, who had brought glory to himself and to the greatest college in America by his unique combination of the analytical thinking qualities of an Oriental philosopher and the brawn and agility of a natural athlete. Chung remembered the scene that had followed as distinctly and vividly as if it had been stamped on his consciousness in burning characters. There had been a moment of tense silence, then Fu Chan-sing had said: "My daughter, the time has come for you to choose between these two men. They await your words."

Chung Wo-lung's long, delicately tapered fingers gripped the arms of his chair as he remembered the frightened, childlike look that had flitted across Toy Sing's exquisitely molded little lotus-bud face as she had looked from the pale, dignified countenance of the great Chinese thinker to the virile, rugged visage of the great Chinese athlete. Then she had buried her face in her father's bosom, sobbing.

Fu Chan-sing had caressed his daughter soothingly.

"You must go," he had said to the men, "she will decide for herself, later."

Another moment of vibrant silence, as the subtle flame of two Old World loves clashed in a New World way. Then Chung Wo-lung had thawed

suddenly and had said with an unnatural geniality: "Yes, Tommy Kee, we must let Toy Sing choose between us."

They had walked home side by side, silently. Then the scientist had shut himself up in his mysterious laboratory for a week.

And now, at the end of the week, he was able to sit and smile evilly to himself, for his work was nearly completed.

CHUNG WO-LUNG arose with a peculiar catlike spring, crossed the room and entered his great laboratory. From a massive safe he extracted a number of delicate instruments. Then, after locking every door, drawing every blind and assuring himself that no curious eyes were spying upon him, he opened the innermost compartment of the huge vault and took out a leaden box. Although the amount of metal should have made it quite heavy, he carried it as if it were light as a feather.

He seated himself at his elaborately equipped work-bench, turned on a strong drop-light, donned a pair of green eye-shades and bent to his exacting task. As if handling a lighted bomb, he drew the lead container toward him. Very cautiously he drew the lid back a trifle. One would have inferred from his motions that he expected something alive to spring out suddenly. A strong beam of light gleamed out of the little crack in the box, noticeable even through the bright illumination of the work-bench light.

He did indeed act as if he were anticipating the sudden escape of some living thing caged within, for he held a small wire net above the opening. The glow from within grew dazzling in its brilliance as he slowly drew the lid farther back. Suddenly, with a blinding flash of ruddy light, a tiny globule darted straight up out of the box, eluded the scientist's sweep of the net with incredible swiftness, and struck the low ceiling with a sharp crack!

Chung Wo-lung swore softly and leaped to the top of the bench. The shining little ball was pressing tightly against the ceiling, as if trying to make its escape through the lath and plaster. The scientist captured it in the wire mesh and climbed down. Strange as it may seem, he had great difficulty in keeping the net in his hands, so vigorously did the dazzling object push upward.

Seated once more at his bench, he found to his annoyance that it was necessary for him to direct his utmost efforts to keeping the scintillating little thing in his possession. At last he hit upon the plan of weighting down the handle of the net with a heavy iron anvil, but even so the strong wire netting strained under the upward pressure of the tiny gleaming ball.

He settled back and regarded the imprisoned globule with interest. It seemed to him like a trapped animal, struggling to force itself between the unyielding bars of its cage. Truly it was remarkable, he reflected; who would have dreamed of the existence of such a substance as corbine? And yet he had it; had isolated a small quantity of it from compound. He dwelt over the eventful hour of its discovery. It had been at this very bench, and he had been experimenting with radium ore in hopes of obtaining some novel results in the matter of radioactivity when suddenly a small particle had risen straight to the ceiling.

That his secret substance, corbine, was allied to radium he was certain, for it was radioactive to a marked degree. But by far the most remarkable feature of his discovery was that corbine reacted violently against the force of gravity. It was capable of lifting many times its own weight.

Step by step he mentally retraced his experimenting. Then, he had reasoned, since corbine is radioactive, it surely must have its antipathy—some substance on which it has no effect. He had found that, he hoped, in the shape of a certain rare element combined with hard rubber. Till now, he had been forced to utilize lead to keep his energetic discovery on this plane of existence.

He glanced at his watch, then at an electric oven near by. The second part of his great experiment ought to be ready for trial by now, he thought, whereupon he opened the oven and removed two objects, both consisting entirely of the nullifying hard rubber composition he had named anticorbine.

The first was a tiny black box bearing a knob and a dial numbered in minute figures. The second was a hollow disk of the same substance, about the size of a silver dollar and perhaps a half-inch in thickness. He inspected them carefully and was highly satisfied. They had baked just long enough and had come out precisely as he had hoped.

Very well. Now he had a means of caging his corbine, but how was he to regulate its activity? He chuckled at this question and set his long, agile fingers to work, reasoning the while in his methodical fashion.

Corbine could be controlled by electricity. He was a wizard with things electrical. Therefore with the proper pains he would be able to control corbine. Having arrived at so logical a conclusion, he worked on with redoubled energy.

With infinite care he placed in the tiny box a minute electric wave transmission set so delicate, so complicated, and yet so perfect and so powerful, that it seemed to be the work of skilled fairy fingers. Then he laid this aside and took up the net containing the rebellious particle of corbine.

As one would subdue a struggling animal, so did he subdue the dazzling little ball with steel forceps. Holding it down by main strength, he pierced it with one end of a hairlike coil of wire which terminated in the hollow anticorbine disk. Instantly its movements ceased and it became passive, lifeless, a dull red pebble slightly larger than a pea.

He secured the fine wire coil and the corbine within the disk and resumed operations on the dialed box. It was a matter of minutes for his expert fingers to pack the tiny controller in a resilient padding that absolutely protected it from injury by jarring or jolting. He clamped the little lid on and secured the minute instrument to a leather wrist strap.

Now for the final step. Would the ether waves from the little control box govern the activity of the now inert corbine? He hoped they would. Very, very carefully he turned the dialed knob on the tiny anticorbine box to 1, so that only the most extremely weak electrical wave would be released. Like a flash the black disk leaped upward. Only by quickly turning off the motive power was he able to keep the device from dashing itself to fragments on the ceiling. Powerful stuff, that! He'd have to be more careful.

He stepped forward and deftly caught the round, flat object as it fell. Then he strapped it firmly to the heavy anvil, placed the anvil and the instrument on a large pair of scales, stepped back, turned the tiny knob on the control box slowly forward and awaited developments.

When the dial was at zero, the heavy iron registered its full weight—150 pounds. Chung Wo-lung turned the knob to 10, and the scale pan rose as if propelled by an unseen hand. The anvil weighed only 135 pounds now. His eyes widened. He turned the knob to 20. The scale arm fell back to 120 pounds.

His eyes shone: he had not expected things to turn out as fine as this! Patiently he increased the dial numbers by tens and watched the scale numbers decrease by tenths, till at last when the knob on the tiny control box rested at 90, the heavy anvil weighed but 15 pounds!—the numbers to which one turned the knob were in inverse proportion to the weight of the object upon which the anticorbine disk was secured. To decrease the weight by nine tenths, one had simply to turn the knob to 90. To lessen the weight by one half, place the knob on the control box at 50. It was indeed simple, he told himself.

He smiled suddenly and very evilly to himself and bent over his workbench till late that night.

The next being the day before the big game, Tommy Kee did not attend his classes, but lay in bed. About 10 o'clock he received a telephone call from Chung Wo-lung, who wished to see him at once on a very important matter.

"Sorry, Chung, I don't believe I can; I'm supposed to be resting up for the game," he replied.

"But this has a great deal to do with the game. If you come, your school will most certainly win tomorrow. I will drive past your house in twenty minutes. Please be ready." With that he hung up.

Though somewhat mystified, the gridiron star obeyed. He quickly dressed and met Chung promptly.

The rivals in love drove some time in silence. Then the elder spoke:

"Tommy Kee, if you were able to jump thirty or forty feet at a single bound, could you win the game tomorrow?"

The athlete regarded him curiously a moment, then grinned.

"Say, what are you trying to do, kid me?" he asked. It was strangely incongruous to hear slangy American college vernacular spoken by a person so strongly Oriental in appearance.

"No, I am serious. I have in this case a little device which, when properly operated, relieves an object from the pull of gravity to any desired degree. Equipped with this you could reduce your weight to fifteen or twenty pounds and thus be able to perform miraculous feats of running and leaping. Would you like to try it out?"

His companion looked at him dubiously, then nodded assent. They drove to a lonely field, some distance from the city. After satisfying himself that no one was near, Chung Wo-lung opened the case and handed it to the other man.

"Strap this to my back, please," he said, indicating the disk. This firmly secured, he turned the knob on the little box and gave a slight spring. He rose about three feet in the air and alighted some distance away, then ran half way around the field, covering ten feet at a bound. Presently he halted before the younger man, smiling.

"Now watch," he exclaimed.

Holding the box in front of him, he ran swiftly for a short distance, gave a mighty leap, soared lightly some ten feet above the ground and alighted easily more than thirty yards distant.

Tommy Kee's eyes widened.

"How do you work it?" he inquired a moment later.

"It is very simple. When you turn the knob to the number 10, it decreases your weight ten per cent. To make a leap such as I just made, it should be turned to about 90, which reduces your weight nine tenths. Of course, if it were turned clear over to 100, a body would have no weight at all and would be carried by the force of the leap out into space. However, this is so regulated that it can not be turned past 90, which makes it impossible for such a thing to happen. Now, do you want to try it?"

Again the younger man nodded silently.

Fifteen minutes later Tommy Kee alighted gracefully by the inventor's side and said huskily: "With this little thing, one man could beat the best football team in the world!"

Chung Wo-lung smiled. "Another thing; you need not carry the control box with you, it operates at any distance."

"But . . . don't you think that it would be better for me to carry it with me on the field, for I will only be able to use it occasionally, and when the time comes, I shall be the only one who will know the exact time to turn it on."

"Yes, I believe that would be better. But above all things, remember this—this affair is to be kept absolutely a secret. No one, not even the coach, is to know about it. Do you agree to that?"

Tommy Kee nodded.

"And if I were you," said Chung Wo-lung on the way home, "I would conceal the apparatus so that you can put it on between halves, and not use it the whole game, for when you have it you can score at will."

CHUNG WO-LUNG sat stolidly through the first half of a heart-rending game and watched his countryman's team steadily outplayed, till at the end of the first half the score stood 13-0.

As the teams left the field at the whistle, he heard grumbles and complaints on all sides.

"What's the matter with China Boy today?" asked the man behind him of his companion; "he isn't half playing." The motionless figure before him could have replied that he was saving himself for the most spectacular demonstration in the history of football.

Five minutes later, the "China Boy" trotted back on the field with his teammates, the black disk securely strapped beneath his sweater, protected by a layer of padding, and the control box under his jersey at his wrist.

At the end of a fifteen minute struggle, during which he did not so much as get his hands on the ball, their opponents were on their ten-yard line and by all indications would put the ball over in the next few minutes.

The teams lined up. The quarterback called his signals slowly and distinctly. Then, with a lightning shift, the ball was in play. A speeding back rounded the end and bore down upon the goal line like a charging lion, when suddenly his defense man immediately in front of him stumbled and half fell in his path.

There was the sickening impact of flesh against flesh, and the ball was knocked from his grasp and bounded crazily toward the side line. Tommy Kee saw his chance. With one of his famous, low-crouching, irresistible plunges, he tore through the tangled group of players and scooped up the ball. Then, as seventy thousand spectators shrieked their dismay, he stopped and began to fumble foolishly at his wrist, while four tacklers raced toward him.

Suddenly he seemed to realize his danger. He crouched low to the ground, and when the nearest man was scarcely a yard away, he gave a powerful leap, soared lightly into the air, cleared the shoulders of the onrushing players by inches and touched the ground several yards away where, with long, effortless bounds, he quickly gained the open field. He slowed his pace, fussed with the wristband of his jersey, then broke into the swift, gliding run the sport fans knew so well, and was over the line for a touchdown before his opponents could recover from their surprize.

The entire action took but a few seconds and happened so quickly that the sight could scarcely follow Kee's movements. For a moment the great

amphitheater sat in open-mouthed amazement, hardly daring to believe their very eyes, then slowly the deep thunder of an incredulous astonishment began to rumble along the close-packed tiers of humanity as the realization drove home to them that they had witnessed a leap equaled only by the most phenomenal Olympic champions.

It took perhaps twenty seconds for the last witness to recover from the shock. The mighty rumble swept around the monster horseshoe stadium with terrifying volume, always gathering speed and intensity, till at last the huge steel-and-concrete pile rocked like a paper house and the earth trembled with the tremendous vibration caused by the awful sound.

Pandemonium reigned on the players' benches. The grim and stolid old coach was as excited as a child as he saw the possibility of making a world's champion high-jumper out of China Boy. He had cleared a good five feet eight inches *from a dead standstill* and in heavy football togs! Had he been in track shoes and had proper training—! The coach rushed back and forth along the side lines like a crazy man. Cheer leaders screamed in a vain effort to make themselves heard above the titanic uproar. The police struggled desperately with a mob of frenzied students who were determined to gain the field. Hats, cushions, confetti, overcoats—in fact anything that was loose—filled the air, propelled by excitement-mad hands.

BEFORE a hoarse, shrieking, delirious bank of madmen, the moleskin warriors took their places for the try-for-point play. Tommy Kee hid a furtive grin as he took his place behind the line.

"I'll give 'em something to yell about this time!" he muttered under his breath. He remembered the sight he had witnessed the day before in the lonely field, and was confident of his prowess. He backed up even farther and made as if he were going to drop-kick.

In a twirling brown leather spiral the ball shot from between the center's legs straight into the outstretched hands of Tommy Kee. The air was rent by mad shouts and hysterical shrieks from all sides as he calmly tucked the ball under his arm and fingered foolishly at his wrist. Suddenly he darted straight for the line of scrimmage, covering ten feet at a step. Gathering every ounce of strength in his muscular body, he closed his eyes and gave an immense leap.

As if by magic he rose over the heads of the astounded players, cleared the high goal-bar by several feet and soared lightly onward through the air.

If up in the stands, any persons should have happened to take their eyes from the field of action long enough to look at Chung Wo-lung, they would have been horror-stricken at the expression on his distorted face. He snatched from his pocket a box identical to the one on Tommy Kee's wrist and with a single fierce twist of his long fingers, turned the dial needle around past 100.

A deathly, awed silence settled over the great throng as the solitary figure of the China Boy rose thirty, forty, fifty, then a hundred feet above the ground. The writhing, swiftly-rising form uttered a single horrifying shriek and tore madly at his wrist. A tiny object, from which dangled a broken strap, fell unnoticed to the ground, where it was trampled to bits by the terrified crowd that streamed out over the field to catch a last glimpse of the fast-disappearing speck in the sky that was Tommy Kee, while Chung Wo-lung walked rapidly homeward, the strong yellow fingers in his overcoat pocket still holding the knob on the duplicate control box around past 100.

RICHARD CONRAD yawned. The yawn was not induced by drowziness. Rather was it the venting of a wearied mental state bordering dangerously on cynicism.

Lazily he settled back in the yielding cushions of his favorite easy chair and stretched his legs closer toward the crackling lumps of burning cannel coal in the cavernous brick fireplace. Like an unfailing potion the leaping tongues of yellow flame seemed to smooth away the crease of irritation in his forehead.

To those glowing embers Conrad owed a goodly portion of his success in life. Many times when inspiration had failed him and his fingers idled listlessly on the keys of his typewriter, he would hopefully and expectantly shamble down from his room on the fifth floor of the club to this big quiet lounge—here to seek his muse in the fascinating flames of the friendly fireplace. And invariably he would dash back up the stairs shortly after, imagination aglow, to hammer out the animated details of a new and thrilling novelette.

For Conrad was a fiction writer. There were some who referred to him as an author—his admirers. Undeceived by the character of his output, Conrad chose to be known merely as a writer of short stories.

His life consisted of a perpetual series of adventures—his mental life. Actually he led a most prosaic existence. Once a pickpocket had relieved him of his watch in a crowded elevated train. And years ago he had served on a jury in a murder trial. Aside from these two experiences fate had unkindly avoided Conrad. Many times he had courted adventure—only to be disillusioned by its sordidness.

But in another world, a world bounded by a limitless and romantic imagination, Conrad had lived the lives of a hundred men. With parched throat and blackened lips he had crawled across the burning sands of the Sahara. As a favored knight of Arthur he had crossed spears with the boldest squires of Olde England. In the squalid dives of Port Said he had conspired with the dregs of Asia Minor. A dozen times he had been shanghaied aboard scudding tramp ships captained by inhuman brutes.

The strain of such a thrilling life was beginning to tell—on Conrad's imagination. Where before he had tingled with excitement in weaving the strands of a mystery yarn, now

the artificiality of his efforts positively irked him.

"What I need," he frequently warned himself, "is an honest-to-goodness thrill—in real life. Night after night I sit here at the club. Never get out any more. My imagination is sadly overworked, and undernourished."

He sighed.

"But what's the use! Romance is dead and buried. Adventure only lives in yesterdays and tomorrows. Even when something out of the ordinary does happen, it's stupidly commonplace—while it's happening."

With a resigned, discouraged gesture he reached over to the table and picked up a newspaper.

"Here's a living example of the rot and corruption out of which I've got to fashion romance. 'Three Dead From Poison Moonshine.' 'Ax Slayer Gets Twenty Years.' 'Mrs. Fenton Granted Decree — Claims Hubby Threw Flat Iron at Her.' "

Listlessly Conrad turned the pages, his disgust deepening at each degrading headline. In the classified section he glanced carelessly at a few want-ads, Lost and Founds, and items marked Personal.

Suddenly his eyes brightened. Again, and more slowly, he read the lines which had stirred his interest. Then with trembling fingers he opened the blade on the little gold knife at the end of his watch chain and cut a slit around the fateful paragraph. Fateful, because his very act seemed fraught with destiny.

A new light shone in Conrad's eyes —excitement, curiosity, determination. He started to his feet, hurried to the coatroom, and bounded out the doors to the street below, almost bowling over two fellow club-members in his hurried exit.

Conrad was on his way to answer the advertisement. It read:

WANTED—I am looking for a man who is willing to gamble for his life with the odds against him, a thousand to one. If he loses, it will be a speedy, merciful end. If he wins, he will have a more thrilling and extraordinary adventure than any human being in this world has ever enjoyed. Men with families or dependents need not apply. Call before midnight tonight fully prepared with affairs adjusted should you never return.—Professor X. Etheray, 34 Cambridge Court.

2

A SWIRLING blast of icy wind and sleet greeted Conrad as he stepped out on the sidewalk. He stopped abruptly.

"What an impulsive fool I am!" and his teeth chattered, partly from excitement, more from the sudden chill. Nevertheless, he hailed a passing taxi.

There is a subtle force within the mentality of every man—a force opposed to reason, that lures with magnetic power. Against conscience, against better judgment it beckons toward the most perilous danger or toward the foulest sin with the charm of the legended Lorelei. Tonight Conrad was the victim of this mesmeric influence.

Rumbling along in the semi-heated cab Conrad tried to collect his thoughts. He had given the driver the address, an unfamiliar street in an unfamiliar section of the city. A thick frost covered the panes of glass at the sides and rear of the car. Through the windshield he watched the blinking traffic lights flash from green to red. They seemed to signal "Danger Ahead", but he gave no heed to their warning.

From his vest pocket Conrad unfolded the newspaper clipping and strained his eyes toward the fine print in the dim illumination of the dome lamp.

"One chance in a thousand!"

He grinned nervously.

"There shouldn't be much competition for the job—whatever it is. I

wonder if I shall be the only applicant."

For one who was speeding toward what was advertised as almost certain death Conrad seemed strangely indifferent. So that no misconceptions may arise as to the possible desire of Richard Conrad to end his life "speedily and mercifully", it must be confessed that he really had no serious intention of being accepted as the successful candidate for whatever task Professor X. Etheray might demand. Impelled by curiosity alone he meant merely to nibble at the bait without being caught in the trap.

Attempts to solve the riddle were brought to a sudden halt by the slowing up of the cab. After Conrad had dismissed the driver he paused for a few seconds to get his bearings. Evidently the professor, if there were such a person, lived in a residential section above the ordinary.

Opening the huge iron gate marked "No. 34", Conrad found himself in a narrow courtway. No lights were visible in the windows of the large stone dwelling that loomed up before him. As he climbed a short flight of steps to the door he felt a chill creep over him. Here was real adventure! Nothing commonplace or sordid about this. At least—not yet.

Three times he rapped the old-fashioned iron knocker. It seemed to echo throughout the house with a hollow, foreboding sound. Still no one came.

"A fine wild goose chase this has been! I might have known such things don't happen nowadays. Probably some high school youngster willing to pay a couple of dollars advertising rates to satisfy what he believes to be a sense of humor. Well, the joke's on me."

He turned away in disappointment. His excitement changed to resentment.

A creak sounded on the stairs in the house. A dim glow illumined a window. The heavy oaken door swung slowly open.

Conrad wheeled about. His heart beat rapidly.

"Ah, it is you, my friend! You have come in answer to my message."

Peering through the darkness Conrad discerned the time-worn features of the man who stood in the doorway. Bearded and with bushy eyebrows, he looked to be almost any age between fifty and seventy. His hair was white. And his eyes seemed to reflect a greenish, luminous glow like a cat who stops to glare in fright at the shining lamps of an approaching motor car.

"I — I — is this 34 Cambridge Court? I—I read an advertisement in the paper," stammered Conrad. "Are you Professor Etheridge?"

"Etheray—yes, I am he. May I invite you in?" His voice was gentle, persuasive, yet commanding.

And Conrad, like a lamb led to slaughter, followed the professor into the dimly lighted living room.

3

"BEFORE I make known my purpose in inviting you here tonight, we must first understand each other on a few points," began the professor.

He had switched on a shaded floor lamp. In the soft glow he studied his visitor. Those gimletlike eyes seemed to penetrate Conrad's mind, to read his thoughts, to detect his insincerity.

"Possibly it may surprize you," said the professor in a smooth, unhurried tone, "to learn that I expected you. I speak of *you* as a type. I do not know your name, nor your occupation. But your character—your reasons for coming here tonight—are quite obvious. An advertisement worded such as mine would attract but one type. Despondent persons? Prospective suicides? Ah, indeed not! Only the true adventurer—the seeker of thrills beyond the commonplace.

"You were attracted by curiosity. You hoped, yet feared, the advertisement would be genuine. And even now you have no idea of risking your life unless you are completely informed of the dangers involved, and certain that the odds for your surviving are reversed. Am I right?"

"Oh, you have me sized up perfectly!" said Conrad with a guilty smile. His respect for Professor Etheray was increasing. "But what do you expect me to do? Carry out some mysterious mission in a forbidden, foreign land—like, uh, well—Tibet?"

"Forbidden? Yes, decidedly! And foreign." The professor paused. "It might better be termed 'the land of the unknown.' First I must be certain of your confidence. I have already taken steps which will assure me that whatever passes between us tonight will remain a secret."

He hesitated, and a crafty, cunning expression came into his eyes. "You will remember that the advertisement stated the applicant was to come prepared for his mission. You—er—embark tonight on your voyage."

A chill of cold fear chased up and down Conrad's spine. Who was this devil who seemed to have such a hypnotic influence over him? What was his game? Hold up? No, that couldn't be it. Well, he'd wait and learn what it was all about. Not much danger. Whenever the old man started any "rough stuff", he would show him a little adventure in two-fisted pugilism.

"To come quickly to the point, I will tell you what I wish you to do. You are to vanish—to fade away into vapor—to become invisible to human eyes."

Conrad sighed in relief. His fear diminished. Now he had solved the riddle. The big adventure was over. This man, this bogus Professor X. Etheray (or perhaps he was a real professor), was just a harmless lunatic. Maybe he was not entirely harmless. But at least, he was merely deluded, deranged.

Bearing in mind the old advice about humoring the insane to keep them from becoming violent Conrad resolved to feign a serious interest until he could safely, and quickly, escape.

"I am an inventor," continued the professor, "also a psychologist, an electrician and a student of what is ignorantly termed the 'supernatural.'"

Conrad wanted to add "and you are Napoleon and Julius Caesar and the King of the Bootleggers' Union," but he discreetly kept his silence.

"For fifteen years," said the old man, and a dreamy look of triumph lighted up his eyes, "I have been at work on the most stupendous idea ever known to man. In Vienna, I acquired considerable reputation as an X-Ray specialist. Had I not adopted my pseudonym in this country, you would recognize my name instantly. A number of years ago you may have read of a series of extraordinary treatments received by wealthy Americans to regain their lost youth—physically and mentally. Oh, it was hushed at the time. The world was not ready for such advanced science.

"Then, suddenly, the renowned Viennese specialist was heard from no more. He had started on a tour of investigation far into the interior of India. It was reported that he had died of the plague. Others said that hostile natives had made way with him. The world quickly forgets.

"That was more than a decade ago. Since then I have lived the life of a recluse, working alone, feverishly, for the final demonstration of my—my" (he hesitated) "miracle—as the world will call it."

Conrad listened, fascinated. Even a lunatic could tell an interesting story, he thought.

"My laboratory? You are closer now to my secret apparatus than any

human being has ever been. It is—but I am diverging. Quite by accident I discovered a force of nature until recently comparatively unknown to man. In my experiments I frequently made use of ether in liquid form. It was while I was perfecting an X-Ray projector. A small wad of ether-soaked cotton was lying on a desk near the apparatus. A faint, pungent odor came to my nostrils as it evaporated.

"I switched on the current of my apparatus—and to my amazement the article upon which I had focused its rays became enveloped in a misty, violet-colored vapor. In a few minutes the air had cleared. Under the same conditions I attempted the experiment again—with no success.

"Whatever had caused this extraordinary vapor I was determined to discover. For months I searched without satisfaction. Then finally, I produced in feeble volume the ray of light—if one might term it light—which I chose to call *etheray*. Later, I assumed this coined phrase as my *nom de plume*.

"My friend, we mortals pride ourselves on our scientific knowledge, our electrical discoveries, our chemical research. We are but children playing with mud pies. There are forces about which we yet know nothing. Stubbornly we are content to believe the testimony of our limited senses. Even now our most learned physicians treat the body like a lump of animate clay—scoffing at the advanced theory which claims all matter to be but vibrations in the ether.

"The indivisible atom of yesterday—where has it gone? Ah, now it is discovered to be made up of billions of electrons. And the electron—can it, too, be divided? Yes, indeed," he paused, "into ether—its native nothingness.

"Now I come to the point of my story. My apparatus, for such it is, has fortunately been perfected while I can still enjoy the triumph of its success. Only yesterday it gave a demonstration for which I have waited in patience these many years."

Professor Etheray paused. It was evident that he was about to disclose a fact of tremendous significance. More for the keen joy of describing for the first time to a fellow-man his life work than to impress his listener, the professor's voice became slightly dramatic.

Conrad was interested, but still on his guard.

"Under the focus of my etheray projector," the professor spoke slowly, "I have dissolved matter! A vase of flowers, beautiful roses, vanished in a violet haze. Only the stems were left and four or five inches of the tapering glass vase. These had been outside the range of the ray. And strangely, this shaft of invisible light had penetrated the wall at the end of my laboratory, cutting as clean a circular hole as you can possibly imagine through steel, wood, stone and cement. Fortunately, its course had cleared the roofs of near-by dwellings and shot upward into space. And being invisible unless in contact with what we call solid objects it was unobserved by people in the streets. So my secret is still safe."

Conrad was now convinced that the man was insane. Nevertheless he experienced a shudder of fear at the awesome portent of the professor's narrative. Suppose this man were telling the truth. Then why—why—?

Conrad leaped to his feet in horror.

"What the devil has all this got to do with me?" he cried indignantly.

Professor Etheray apparently expected this sudden change in his visitor's attitude.

"Let me finish," he said calmly, "before you accuse me of being the fiend you now suspect me to be. The rose is in my laboratory at this moment, as fresh and lovely as ever; the glass vase is intact; and the wall is

none the worse for its experience. You mistake the nature of my experiment. I have not been working fifteen years on this machine to produce merely a force of destruction. Objects within the range of its ray become invisible to the human eye. Nor have they substance or solidity. To the human senses—they do not exist."

"But how do you bring them back?" anxiously asked Conrad, who had again seated himself. "If your ray reduces a material object to nothing—how then can you reconstruct the original object?"

Professor Etheray shifted uneasily. His greenish eyes lost their penetrative force; they glinted cunningly.

"It would be extremely difficult for you to grasp the technical explanation. It has required fifteen years of study and experimentation even for me fully to understand this force of nature which I have finally succeeded in controlling. But why, indeed, need I explain further to you. Tonight, you have voluntarily placed yourself under my direction. If you are ready we will proceed to the laboratory."

Conrad jumped up in anger.

"Why, you poor deluded fool! If you think I am going to let you burn a hole in me you're mistaken. I'll—I—"

Those green eyes fixed on Conrad's face. The bushy eyebrows contracted. Beads of perspiration appeared on the professor's forehead as he summoned his terrific hypnotic powers into play.

Conrad swayed unsteadily. He tried to shake off the evil influence that seemed to sap his strength and bind his tongue.

The professor stepped to the curtained doorway. Again his manner was genteel, persuasive, compelling.

"Come!" he said.

And Conrad, drawn by a mental force too powerful to resist, followed Professor Etheray meekly up the creaking stairs to the laboratory above.

4

"I HOPE you appreciate fully the importance of this experiment," said the professor, as they entered a large room, evidently the laboratory, though it was furnished with the sumptuous comfort of a living room.

"This is my workshop," and his gesture indicated, not without a touch of pride, the battery of intricate-appearing machines on a table at the end of the room.

Around four walls were bookshelves filled with scientific volumes. An easy chair faced a fireplace in which the embers of glowing coals still gave off a pleasant warmth. No doubt the professor spent but little of his time outside his laboratory.

Conrad fought inwardly to shake off the dizzy weakness that held him powerless.

"I am going to get out of here," he muttered faintly. "I am going back to the club."

"I fear that you overestimate the danger," soothed Professor Etheray. "Truly, our little experiment is quite a harmless operation. And if it proves successful," he added in a triumphant tone, "the world will be at our feet.

"Do you realize the stupendous possibilities of the etheray? You and I, my friend, will control the most powerful force known to the world—a force which we may exercise for good or evil. At our will nations may be destroyed, cities wiped out. Governments will tremble in horror at the mysterious disappearance of their rulers. A tyrannical manipulator of finances will be sitting in a directors' meeting behind the safe walls of his moneyed temple of steel and stone. Before the very eyes of his associates, he will shriek in horror—and vanish in a mist, never to be seen again by man.

"Pointed like a machine gun at advancing armies the invisible etheray will dissolve in a few minutes entire

regiments and divisions, which formerly fought for years with their puny artillery and bullets. Under its focus battleships will disappear with less trace than those sunk by submarines."

The professor was waxing enthusiastic as he allowed his imagination to picture the terrific influence his discovery would exercise in the future history of the world.

"No longer will engineers plan railroads that wind in and out among the hills because they cannot conquer steep grades. With our perfected machine, enlarged proportionately, we will carve a clean tunnel in ten seconds' time through a rugged range of mountains.

"The possibilities are infinite. I hardly dare to conceive the enormity of our power—yours, my friend, and mine. For you shall share it with me."

He advanced fondly toward a machine which looked not unlike a motion picture projector.

"This is my life work," he said proudly, as he patted the apparatus affectionately.

Conrad stood in silent fascination, unable to move or cry out.

"You will notice that these doors lead to a balcony, which is screened from the view of outsiders. By pointing the projector slightly upward through the open doors toward the sky, objects in the background do not come under the ray. Only the object which is to be dematerialized, or etherized, as I unscientifically call it for lack of a better term, comes under the focus. The pedestal upon which it rests also vanishes.

"And now that I have explained briefly, let us begin our experiment. You are to stand over there in the doorway on that footstool. The etheray will be six feet in diameter. You will be completely within its focus."

Like an experienced photographer who putters with his camera before snapping an exposure, the professor squinted through the huge lenses of his machine. He pressed a few switches, and examined each control to see that it would function properly.

Absorbed in the intricacies of his mechanism he failed to observe the change which had come over Conrad. Since the professor had transferred his concentrative powers to his machine, the mesmeric mist had lifted. Conrad's brain cleared. He again became alert and on his guard.

The professor walked nervously over to the paneled double doors. Cautiously he swung them open and peered out into the darkness. Then he picked up the footstool and placed it on the threshold.

As if to measure the distance from his machine and also the focus which would be necessary to envelop his subject, he stepped upon the pedestal. For the moment he had apparently forgotten Conrad in the absorption of his preparations.

He glanced across the room—and screamed in horror!

Conrad, recovering completely from his apathy, had grasped an iron poker from the fireside. With a quick, determined snap of his arm he hurled it, not at the professor, but at that damnable, fiendish mechanism.

IT ALL happened in a few seconds. A blinding flash of light! A shrieking wail of terror! Then the semi-darkness of the room was illumined by a pale, violet haze—a mysterious vapor that enveloped the rigid body of Professor Etheray as he dissolved from human view under the merciless consuming focus of his own machine.

Transfixed with horror, Conrad stood helplessly by, unable to prevent this ghastly phenomenon.

A pungent, sickening odor of evaporating ether filled the room. The faintly discernible form of what was once the professor's body grew indistinct in the violet fog.

Gradually it vanished completely—except those burning, greenish eyes. They seemed to hang in the atmosphere for a minute, sending out one last terror-stricken appeal for help. Then they vanished, and the room was plunged in darkness, except for the flickering glow of dull, red embers in the fireplace.

Conrad swept his hand across his forehead—bewildered.

"Professor!" he shouted. "Where are you? Can you hear me?"

Silence—except for the slight buzzing of the etheray projector. It was still sending out its invisible rays through the open doorway, into the starry heavens, perhaps dissolving a thousand planets that came within its deadly range.

Impulsively Conrad stumbled over behind the machine. He searched on the floor for the poker; found it; and in a fury of nervous fear he slashed again and again at the mechanism until it lay at his feet, a battered mass of twisted wires, broken wheels, and shattered glass.

5

SUDDENLY the room was bathed in light. A man came running from the doorway.

"Mr. Conrad! Mr. Conrad! What is it, sir? Have you been attacked?"

Conrad looked up sheepishly at the club steward. In his hand, tightly clenched, was a poker. At his feet lay the twisted, battered remains of what had once been an expensive floor lamp.

"It's nothing, Jones; just a little attack of excessive imagination. You may put the damage on my monthly house bill."

Three hours later the clicking keys of Conrad's typewriter slowed. He arose; walked over to the bathroom; searched in a medicine chest above the washbowl; drew out a tiny bottle marked ether; whiffed its pungent odor a few times; replaced it; and hurried back to his typing.

In WEIRD TALES for October

The

THING *in the* PYRAMID

By JOHN DWIGHT

An eery, creepy tale of a lost city of the Mayans in southern Mexico.

On Sale At All News Stands September First

What Dread Fate Took the Crew and Passengers of This Mystery Ship in the Pacific?

The Masters From Beyond

By EDWARD PODOLSKY

Author of "The Figure of Anubis"

ANYONE in Gloucester can recall the *Caroline;* the "Mystery Ship," she was later called. The day had been calm and beautiful. In the late forenoon a strange craft drifted silently, almost like a ghost, into port and ran ashore. Her sail was set and rudder lashed against her stern. Captain Musgrave, from the first, had become impressed with a feeling that there was something queer about her, so he summoned his two old cronies, Lawyer Mackey and Dr. Underhill, and these three boarded the ship.

"Dreadfully quiet," murmured the captain in the course of the inspection.

"Something indefinably queer; the whole ship seems saturated with mystery," affirmed Lawyer Mackey.

Nowhere was anyone to be seen. Two chairs had remained undisturbed on deck. In the cabin the table was set for a meal. The beds had been made up. Silken dresses hung in the wardrobes. Everything was left untouched. Nowhere were there any signs of violence or struggle.

"What has become of the crew and passengers?" asked Captain Musgrave.

Presently Dr. Underhill returned, bearing in his hand a thick copy book. "This may enlighten us a bit," he said to his friends.

"The ship's log?" queried the captain, most eagerly.

"No. Evidently more important. I found this in the captain's cabin and it bears quite a lurid title: *Last Days in a Lifeless World,* and, also a subtitle: *The Masters From Beyond.*"

The most amazing document that had ever been written was that one discovered by Dr. Underhill in the captain's cabin. This manuscript seemed to have been guarded with more than jealous care by these three old men, and it was only after the death of the last of them, Captain Musgrave, that the manuscript finally passed into the hands of one who has seen fit to put it before the general public.

THE MANUSCRIPT

THE day dies slowly, almost with a gasp, it seems. Soon night will come—a dreadful night of a lifeless world, a yawning void. The moon already appears in the gray heavens, like a brazen ball, tarnished, and grinning through the depressive haze. I alone am left out of passengers and a crew that numbered a hundred, alone in a soundless and colorless world. I appear to be moving in an abode of spirits, as if in a vision; I neither feel, nor hear, nor perceive the slightest sensation. I but see, and only through my sight am I aware of a dreadful sickliness, a depressive calm that envelops all, everywhere.

We set sail from San Francisco on a trip to the Philippines, June 20, 1898. The weather was propitious, and for several days nothing went amiss. On the sixth day a tempest

arose and we were driven many miles out of our course. When the storm had subsided, which was as suddenly as it had come, we found ourselves in strange waters. The sky seemed to have taken on a new aspect; the waters were calm, not a ripple disturbed the sea as far as the eye could see.

A depressive calm was about us; it seemed to be rising from the very sea itself. The air was suffused with a sickly, jaundiced yellowness. The sun hung low in the sky, enormous and leering, with a calm fierceness.

"Does it strike you that we look small, almost fearfully small?"

Lawton spoke these words to me. I had noticed, from the beginning, the awful expanse of sea and space about us. The bigness of it all was stupendous, overwhelming.

We lived for three lifeless days and nights in a lifeless world. We seemed to move like ghosts in spirit land. The awful monotony sank into our souls and became part of us.

On the fourth day terror came upon us. A disappearance was reported from among the passengers.

"Mr. Clarekle has gone, sir."

"Gone? How?"

"Disappeared, sir. Mr. Lawton said he is coming up to see you presently."

"WELL, Lawton," I greeted my friend, "how—?"

"It's come, Gennert. We're done for."

I gazed at him, amazed, then startled. "What's come, Lawton?" I finally found words to ask.

"It's one of these—masters from beyond, that's a name as good as any. You know how Clarekle disappeared? He was fished up, vanished right before our eyes. Walden, MacGregor and I were speaking to him and he was snatched up from the very midst of us."

"Now you're talking nonsense," I said with an attempt at a chuckle. "This ungodly atmosphere is getting on our nerves—"

From afore came a startled cry, then a sudden silence. Later, Kirke was described to have vanished under the same circumstances that had surrounded the disappearance of Clarekle.

I was stumped, puzzled. I retired to my cabin and flung myself upon the bed. I dozed off, and now and then I imagined I heard startled cries, moans, then silence. I fell asleep.

I must have slept for some time, for when I awoke the moon hung in the eternally gray heavens. Always that same moon, painted in faint blood and grinning. The depressiveness seemed to have increased; the calm, the lifelessness, seemed to have become greater.

At the door I met Lawton; he had a strangely wistful look in his eyes. "How are you, Gennert?" he said. I returned his greeting. "There's no one on ship," he continued.

"No one on ship! What's become of them? Jumped overboard?"

Lawton looked steadily at me for a space. "No," he answered, "they've disappeared, gone, vanished, much the same as Clarekle and Kirke."

Then for the first time in that senseless, silly world I became afraid. "We're mad, Lawton, both of us. The very atmosphere is saturated with a madness, a strange unreality." Lawton assented silently. "We're the only ones left, and we'll make the best of the situation."

WE WENT on deck and sat down to talk.

"Gennert," said Lawton in the course of our conversation, "our fate will be much the same as that of the *Marie Celeste*—"

"The *Marie Celeste!*" I broke in.

"Yes. The captain and his family and the crew disappeared quite suddenly and mysteriously out at sea, and

the ship drifted back as mute testimony to an occurrence which seems beyond credence."

"How do you account for the disappearance?"

"In the same manner that I account for the disappearance of our crew and passengers. This super-race from somewhere in space, masters, as I always called them, from beyond. We're owned, Gennert, owned by someone, something superior to us—some thing or things with superior intelligence, inhabitants of some distant world who quite easily come down to earth, as we can descend to the bottom of the sea. We may be of value to them, as food, perhaps, as fish are to us."

"And have there been any signs, any proof of such a race of superhuman beings, as you call them?" I asked, a little impressed with his yarn.

Lawton hesitated but a few seconds, and then resumed with the same zest that had characterized his talk before. "Of course," he said, "there have been proofs, both visible and invisible. Of the latter I recall the curious case of Mrs. Charton, at Sutton Courthouse, Sutton Lane, Chiswick, in whose home windows were mysteriously broken. The mansion was detached and surrounded by high walls. No other building was near it. The police were called. The constables, assisted by members of the household, guarded the house, but the windows continued to be broken, both in front and behind the house. A still more impressive visitation from these visitors from beyond was told to me by an old tar. At midnight, February 24, 1885, Latitude 37° N., and Longitude 170° E., somewhere between Yokohama and Victoria, the captain of the bark *Innerwick* was aroused by his mate, who had seen something unusual in the sky. The captain went on deck and saw the sky turning fiery red. All at once a large mass of fire appeared over the vessel, completely blinding the spectators. The fiery mass fell into the sea. The bark was struck flat aback, and a roaring white sea passed ahead. Then again, Captain Breyer of the Dutch steamer *Valentijn* was in the South China Sea, when at midnight he saw a rotation of flashes. It looked like a horizontal wheel turning rapidly, and it was above water. Perhaps the wheel of a vessel of the super-race from beyond! At another time two wheels of fire were seen which the men described as rolling millstones of fire—"

"What I want is positive proofs," I cried out in exasperation, "proofs that those masters from beyond have been upon the earth."

"You shall have them," Lawton quickly answered. "A convincing proof of these super-things is their footprints. Some thirty years ago, at Devonshire, footprints were discovered in the snow. They were clawed footmarks of an unclassifiable form alternating at huge but regular intervals with what seemed to be the impression of the point of a stick. But the scattering of the prints was over an amazing expanse of territory; obstacles, such as hedges, walls, houses, were surmounted. There was intense excitement; the track was followed by huntsmen and hounds, until they came to a forest, from which the hounds retreated baying and terrified. Nobody dared to enter the forest. Then again, a considerable sensation was caused in the towns of Topsham, Lymphstone, Exmouth, Teighmouth, and Dawlish, in Devonshire, by a vast number of foot tracks of a most strange and mysterious description. These marks were generally eight inches in advance of each other; the impressions were cones in incomplete, or concentric basins. The footprints looked as if branded with a hot iron. Also in Scotland, among the high mountains where Glenorchy, Glenlyon and Glenochay are contiguous, there have been met with several times, dur-

ing several winters, the tracks of a creature never seen before. From the depth that the feet sank in the snow the creature must have been of considerable size. I may also cite instances of mysterious disappearances under the weirdest circumstances, which, for some reason or another, have been kept still. There is a village in northern Russia where the three most prominent citizens were found in a forest, beside the track of one of these super-things, with their heads split open, as if pressure had been applied by two enormous fingers, one at the forehead, the other at the back of the head. Their brains were missing, eaten out, it seemed, from their very heads."

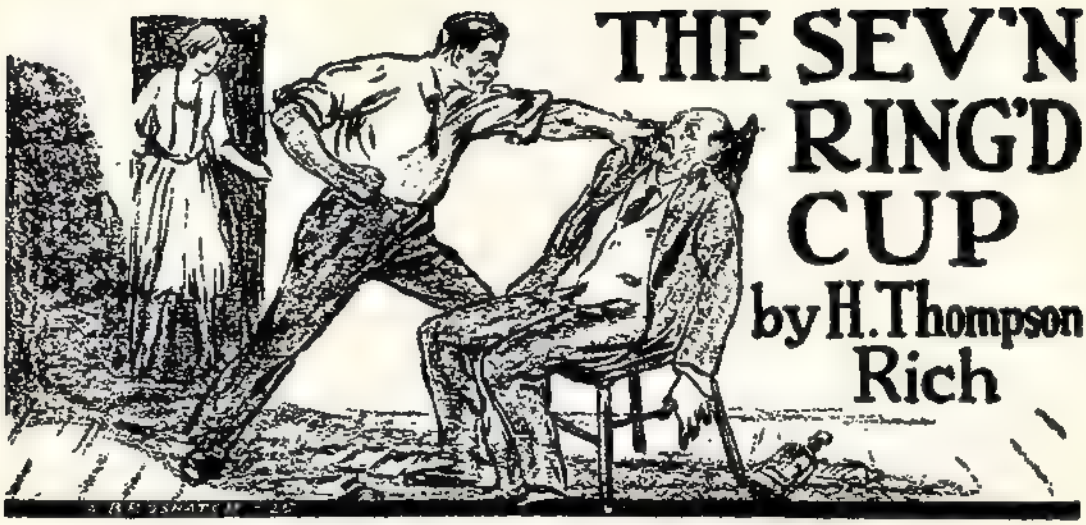
"It seems," I jested grimly, "that our brains are of some use, after all. These masters from beyond, as you call them, are epicures of an advanced sort."

Lawton was in no mood for jesting. In fact, his face seemed to me to have become a bit haggard and drawn. "I tell you, Captain,"—his voice was almost a groan now—"that we're owned by a race of super-creatures."

I said nothing; I sat and simply stared at Lawton. Midnight was rapidly approaching, and with it a darkness, intense and frightful. The oppressive calm lay like a mantle over the lifeless sea. The grinning moon and the sickly stars were obscured by the fearful blackness. After a time the pitchy darkness was succeeded by a lurid gloom such as I had never seen. It seemed that the sky was afire, and the sea also. On every side the lurid gloom surrounded us. Lawton sat with his eyes staring into the fire-colored spaces. I found no words to break the awful monotony; I sat and stared at Lawton. Yet even as my gaze was concentrated upon him a strange mist seemed to crawl around him. He grew thinner and thinner, and then, with a snap, he seemed to disappear upward.

I know not whether to believe the testimony of my senses; or is it that my mind has lost its grip? The ship is fastened in a motionless sea; I am the only living being in a lifeless world. I know that if I should try to jump overboard the sea would not receive me. It is green and full of sloth and seems thick like jelly. The weariness of it all has entered my soul. I have no interest to——.

HERE the document ends abruptly, and the fate of Captain Gennert, no doubt, was the fate of his crew and passengers.



THE SEV'N RING'D CUP

by H. Thompson Rich

Author of "The Purple Cincture," "The Crimson Crucifix," etc.

EVERY advertisement, they say, brings at least one response. It was in this forlorn hope that Doris Lee parted with $4.16 of her dwindling funds in order to insert the following, once, under Business Opportunities in *The Times:*

MYSTERIES SOLVED

Bring your problem to me. I will take it up in a scientific way. All inquiries regarded strictly confidential. References furnished. Satisfaction guaranteed. Call 290 W. 76th St.—Apt. 29 D.

Taking the remaining eighty-four cents of what had been a crisp and beautiful five-dollar bill, she hunted up a quiet little tea place and spent eighty of it on luncheon and a tip. Then, adding an odd penny to the four cents, she subwayed to 72nd street, got out and walked to 76th, turned down and entered the apartment building at 290.

The elevator boy let her off at the second floor, whereupon she proceeded along the corridor until she had passed three doors on her left, pausing outside the fourth. On it, in small nickel characters, was the number 29 D. She took a key from her silver mesh-bag and inserted it in the lock. The door opened. She went in. It shut behind her.

Inside, Doris took off her hat and commenced tidying up the tiny living room. If anyone answered her silly ad it would probably be tomorrow—and things should look at their simple best. But very little tidying was required. The room was as neat and trim and essentially feminine and charming as its dainty occupant. It couldn't help being so, any more than she could. She was a Lee of the old Virginian stock and her surroundings, however humble, could not but carry the same air.

Fifteen minutes did all to it that could be done. Then Doris read a while. Somehow she didn't feel like writing today, even with the exchequer so short and a story contracted for from *Pilgrims' Magazine.* The truth of it was, she was sick of writing pot-boilers! She would have jumped at the chance to sit down quietly and write a novel, but these incessant stupid stories to be mingled with *Hints on Knitting* and *How to Put Up Jams and Jellies* were beginning to get on her nerves. She was tired of writing for women. She wanted to write red-blooded yarns for men to read—and she couldn't, be-

cause she hadn't had the experiences. That, and the fact that funds were low, had been the inspiration for the ad. Perhaps an adventure would come of it. At any rate, the possibility was worth the $4.16.

PINS and needles, as a food staple, are not very nourishing, but Doris lived on them for the next twenty-four hours, principally. Then, about 2 the following afternoon, the telephone rang.

"Gentleman to see you," said the switchboard operator. "Says he's come in answer to some advertisement. Must be wrong, I guess."

"No—send him up."

How her heart was fluttering!

Presently a knock sounded on the door. She opened it, and a tall young man carrying an enormous bundle entered. He seemed surprized at finding so young and pretty a girl.

"My name is Osbourne, Henderson Osbourne," he stated, clinging to his bundle uncertainly. "I came in answer to your ad in *The Times*."

"Yes. Won't you sit down?"

She pushed forward a chair. He seated himself uneasily, placing the bundle on the floor at his feet.

If only she could keep him, now that he had come!

"What is the nature of your problem?" she asked in as steady a voice as she could summon, taking a seat beside him.

He looked hesitatingly about the room, then at her. Both seemed somewhat to allay his suspicions.

"You will pardon me," he began, "if I first ask you something about yourself."

She smiled bravely.

"You have come to solve your mystery, not mine, remember."

"I know—but as this is a matter that involves several million dollars, I think I am not unreasonable in making the request. Besides, in the advertisement you stated that references would be furnished."

Several million dollars! Doris scarcely concealed a gasp of surprize. Then she told him her name and produced letters to establish her family connections. These seemed to satisfy him.

"But your qualifications for such a business as you are conducting?"

"Those I shall have to ask you to decide after you have presented your case to me."

She watched him tensely.

"Well," he said at length, "I suppose I'll have to let it go at that. You are my last hope." As he spoke he began slowly unwrapping the paper from the bulky bundle at his feet.

Doris watched him fascinatedly. When the final wrapping had been removed he lifted up an antique chalice of grotesque design.

"This is the Sev'n-Ring'd Cup of Jamshyd, one-time king of the Persians." He turned it around. "Notice the seven rings. Lord only knows what they're for!"

Doris sat there as though in a dream. Dimly she saw him set the heavy chalice down. Dimly she saw him reach into his pocket and take out a letter. Then she became conscious that he was talking again.

"My father was Franklyn Osbourne, former minister to Persia. You may recall that he died some months ago, on the *Baltic*, as he was on his way home. It was of course a great blow to me—and also a great responsibility, for as I was his only son the estate came into my hands. But father was not a wealthy man, comparatively speaking, and when everything had been settled there were surprizingly few thousands left, outside of a house or two. His most valuable legacy was—the Sev'n-Ring'd Cup." He took the letter he had been holding and, after a glance at it, handed it to her. "I think if you will be

kind enough to read that letter it will save a lot of explaining."

Doris found herself holding the letter. Lowering her eyes to it, she read:

Hamadan, Persia,
April 17, 1919.

My dear Son:

Declining health forces me to give up my post here and return to the States. I really should have told you long ago of a discovery I made some years back, but had put it off until such time as I could tell you about it directly. Now, however, I feel it my duty to you to risk putting it in writing, in case the worst should happen before I can see you once more.

In brief, while excavating at my villa here, at the time I was making extensive alterations, I chanced upon a treasure that must total millions—the accumulated riches of centuries of Persian rulers, hidden by Jamshyd, fourth king of the Pishdadian dynasty.

Yet in telling you, lest this letter by any chance should go astray and fall into evil hands, I have thought best to put the secret of where the treasure is hidden into a cipher, which I have cut into the side of a curious urn that reposes upon my library table here. This urn is the Sev'n-Ring'd Cup of Jamshyd. I found it with the treasure and brought it up. The rest of the ancient treasure remains intact. You, with your education and training, will easily be able to solve the cipher, in the event it becomes necessary to—and the treasure will be yours.

But, my Son, take all this as little more than a precaution. Unless some unexpected complication develops I shall reach home safely and you shall hear it all from my own lips. So do not alarm yourself about me.

Your loving father,
FRANKLYN OSBOURNE.

When she had finished, Doris looked up.

"So the precaution was well given?"

"Yes, he died on the way home."

"But the Cup—you have been to Persia already?"

"Yes. You see by the date on the letter that it was written over a year ago. I lost no time, after the funeral was over, in making the trip. I felt that he would have wanted me to. And I found the Cup, just where he said I would, as you see. But I could not solve the cipher, nor has anyone been able to. I have employed the best detective agencies and the villa has been dug and searched thoroughly—but we have found nothing. And the worst of it is I can't get them to keep up the search. They say my father must have been insane, and refuse to waste any more time on it. They even say this Jamshyd was only a legendary king and never really existed. But I don't care what they say. I know my father knew what he was talking about. He says in that letter that he discovered a great treasure. Therefore, detectives and everyone else to the contrary notwithstanding, he did. That treasure exists. I know it! Your ad has brought me to you. Can you help me find it?"

"I can tell you nothing until I have seen the cipher."

"To be sure." Osbourne passed the heavy cup over to her.

Doris took it and, turning it around slowly, brought the following to view:

Iram indeed is gone with all his Rose,
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-Ring'd Cup where no one knows;
But still a Ruby kindles in the Vine,
And many a garden by the water blows.

Now she remembered where she had heard of that Sev'n-Ring'd Cup before! It was a quatrain from the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. The letters were painstakingly scratched in the bronze surface of the cup, evidently with a pocket knife.

Under the quatrain, scratched in with the same instrument, was the cipher:

7	7-6	19-19	x	x-4	4	0-1	0-22	12-2
17	30	24-9	13	16	17	23-2	21-1	x-13
0	0	19	19	0	17	0-3	19-10	2
9	20	2	17	27		27	26	1

Doris studied this a long time.

"Well," remarked Osbourne at length, "rather a tough one, eh?"

Doris looked up at him with an enigmatic smile.

"Supposing I should solve it, what would my reward be?"

"What is the customary charge?"

Doris breathed deep, then said it.

"Fifty per cent."

"Whew," gasped Osbourne, "your charge is certainly steep!"

"Who told you it was my charge?"

"Didn't you?"

"No—you asked me what the customary charge was. Buried treasure comes under the head of salvage—and the customary charge for salvage is one-half the value of the salvaged goods. But if you feel—"

"I'm no piker!" interrupted Osbourne. "Fifty per cent suits me."

Doris had been on the point of coming down to ten per cent!

"Naturally," she said when she had recovered herself, "I make no charge whatever until the treasure is recovered."

Osbourne noted that she said "until" and not "unless".

"How long will it take you to solve the cipher?" he asked.

"Suppose you 'phone me tomorrow." She gave him her number. "And—you'd better take along the Cup. I'll make a copy of the cipher. I needn't copy the quatrain for I have a volume of the *Rubaiyat*.

Five minutes later he took his leave. Doris was able to wait till the door had closed behind him. Then she flung herself on a little settee by the window and laughed and cried and shivered in delight by turns. What a delectable adventure! Even if nothing came of it, she would make it into a story of the red-blooded sort. And if she *should* succeed in fathoming the strange cipher—broad avenues of romance reached out before her. Over far seas they led. They did not stop short of the mystic land of Persia.

2

OSBOURNE telephoned the next afternoon at three.

"Well, have you made anything out of it?"

"Suppose you come right over and see!"

He lost no time in getting there.

"You don't mean to tell me you've done it?" he demanded when he had reached her apartment.

Doris smiled and handed him a strip of paper.

"This is what the cipher says."

He took it with trembling hands and read:

Dig down twenty feet from mid-point cellar square.

"Holy mackerel! How did you do it?"

"Principally by sitting up nearly all last night. I knew if I could do it at all I could do it in twenty-four hours. You see, I've studied ciphers a little. It—it's part of my business. Would you like to have me explain?"

"I certainly would!"

"Well, then come over here and sit down and I'll show you. It's really quite simple—after you see it."

She led the way to the settee, where they seated themselves side by side.

"Those numbers," she began, indicating a copy of the cipher she held in her hand, "refer to the quatrain and tell how many letters to count in for the desired letter. You will notice the cipher is divided into nine sections. Each section spells a word. For instance, take the top line of the first section. Counting in seven letters from the first line, seventeen letters from the second line and nine letters from the fourth line, you get d-i-g—*dig*. Similarly, the numbers in the second section tell how many letters to count in to get the second word, d-o-w-n—*down*. The 0 is a blank and indicates there was no w in that line. Wherever the 0 appears

you drop to the next line of the cipher for the number that indicates the corresponding letter in the quatrain. The x's are for letters missing altogether. You have to guess what they mean from the context. But that isn't hard. For example, take x, thirteen, nineteen, seventeen in section four. The other three numbers indicate letters e-e-t. And the preceding word was *twenty*. It doesn't take much guessing to supply the missing f, and you have—*feet*. Do you follow me? Naturally I don't expect you to get it in a minute, when it took me all yesterday afternoon and most all night to work it out."

Slowly and patiently she explained the cipher. But like any other cipher, it was simple when worked out and Osbourne was presently satisfied that her solution was correct.

"But now I'm puzzled about the meaning of the message," he told her.

"Why, it seems perfectly plain. It tells you just where to dig and how deep to go. I don't see what more you could want."

Osbourne took a paper and pencil and sketched a rough diagram.

"Look here. This is the ground plan of the villa. It's in the shape of an L. Now where would you say the mid-point was?"

Doris thought a bit, then pointed with a slender, neatly manicured finger directly at the angle of the base and the perpendicular.

"I'd say it would be at the intersection of the diagonals of the biggest square you could get there."

Osbourne studied the diagram in the light of this suggestion. Then he leaped to his feet. He was greatly excited.

"By George, you're right! It's as plain as day! I wish to heaven I'd come to you in the first place! Now the next question is, getting there—and that's *some* question! If it weren't such an outlandish place, I—I'd sort of like to have you come along. Something unexpected might turn up."

Doris heard him in dismay.

"But—I'd planned on coming."

He turned and faced her, scarcely knowing whether to take her seriously or not.

"You'd planned on coming? Do you know that it takes more than two months to reach the place? That you have to travel on practically every known beast and mechanism before you get there, including trains, boats, autos, horses, camels—and maybe even that ancient means of locomotion, the human foot?"

"No, I didn't know all that—but it only makes me more determined to go."

"But you couldn't. It's ridiculous. You stay here and I'll keep you fully informed by cable."

Doris saw that stern measures were necessary. She tossed her head angrily.

"I shall do nothing of the sort! We are in this thing fifty-fifty—and we're going to see it through fifty-fifty—or else we aren't going to see it through at all!"

She didn't know what she meant, but she was talking. Osbourne didn't know either—and when a man doesn't know what a woman means, she's safe. He yielded by degrees.

"But how could you come with me? You'd have to have a chaperon. And my experience has been that it is best to hunt treasure alone. Last time I took along a valet but had to get rid of him—snoopy beast! And as for a chaperon—"

"Since when has the antique custom of chaperonage been revived?" interrupted Doris scathingly.

"You mean to say you would travel five thousand miles alone with a man you scarcely know?"

Doris smiled.

"I'll take a chance on the son of an American minister, even if he was

of the politico and not of the clergy!"

"But your parents—what will they say?"

"They won't say anything, because they've long ago given me up as beyond control. You see, one must have considerable latitude to conduct successfully such a business as this."

"So I should imagine! Then you insist on going?"

"Positively."

"Very well. I will agree on one condition."

"What is the condition?"

"That you allow me to defray all your expenses. I couldn't be put to the embarrassment of traveling with a young lady paying her own way."

Doris laughed. But she was not laughing at Osbourne's remark. She was thinking of her bank balance of $31.63!

"All right, if you insist," she conceded. "But you must keep an account of it and deduct it from my half of the treasure."

3

HAMADAN, the summering place of Alexander the Great, Ecbatana, Achmetha of Ezra VI, olden capital of the Medes and Persians, famed for its palaces of Darius and Xerxes and its tombs of Esther and Mordecai, lies, according to the geographies, "upon a fertile, healthful plain, sixty-one hundred feet above sea level"—but should you happen to stray there, you would find it only a stifling, dusty plateau whereon, amidst glorious ruins, a few thousand Mohammedans, Armenians and Jews eke out a squalid existence from the sun-baked soil and in devious trades. True, it is one of the largest cities of modern Persia—and is still the vacation adjunct to Teheran—but Persia itself is no longer anything but a sorry phantom of its former self.

"A rotten, filthy hole!" pronounced Osbourne when at last, after a tedious pilgrimage, they had reached it. "I hope I never see the place again! Twice is twice too much!"

"And to think," breathed Doris, to whom every moment since they left New York had spelled Romance with a big R, "Cyrus and Antiochus once led conquering armies here."

"I'll say they did a thorough job of it!"

They had chartered one of those "tin" motor cars that, thanks to the enterprize of their American manufacturer, now invade every portion of the globe, and were making for the villa.

For half an hour they bumped and jolted over the ancient highway in all save mechanical silence. Finally Osbourne turned to his companion.

"There it is," he said.

Doris looked in the direction he indicated—and there, seemingly at the very base of a gigantic snow-capped mountain, she saw a low square mansion of massive stones, yellowish-red in color, almost Moorish in design.

"From this side it looks square," he said, "but as I explained it's really in the shape of an L. Father bought it from a British official and had it remodeled. The mountain is Mount Elwend."

Their rickety vehicle rumbled on—and at last drew up outside the villa. Osbourne got down, helped Doris to the ground, paid the driver, tipped him amply, and they started in with their luggage.

"Now what the devil," thought the driver in his native tongue, as he drove off, "would a pair of newlyweds be wanting to spend their honeymoon for in a place like that?"

Once inside, Osbourne led the way immediately to the library—and there they paused in dismay. The place had been ransacked as completely as if it had been pillaged for wages.

And not only the library, they discovered before long, but the whole villa as well, had been gone over with a fine tooth comb.

"Some of the detectives you employed have evidently been treasure-hunting on their own hook," mused Doris. "No wonder they weren't anxious to continue under your auspices!"

"Well, we might as well know the worst at once. Let's go down cellar and see if they've left anything."

So by the light of an electric torch they made their way into the dark recess underneath the villa.

"Ha!" exclaimed Osbourne. "Here are some fresh attempts at excavation."

But a careful search failed to reveal any but superficial diggings. And the point at the intersection of the diagonals of the square proved to be untouched. Considerably relieved they returned upstairs.

"Whoever they are," said Doris, "they are on the wrong trail. Do you know, I believe they have been looking for the Cup!"

"I think you're right. Lucky I took it back with me."

They had now reached the library again. Taking their luggage, Osbourne led the way upstairs.

"I'm going to give you father's room," he said. "I'll sleep down below in the library. I hope we won't be here more than a couple of nights." He looked at his watch. "It's 1 o'clock. I wonder if I could dig twenty feet before supper?"

"You could try," she smiled. "I'll come down and help you. I can at least hold the light!"

HALF an hour later Osbourne, with a pick and shovel, was hard at work. Near by sat Doris, on an upturned box, holding an oil lantern. The moments ticked on and the hole deepened. By 4 o'clock it was ten feet below the surface it had started from. There remained but ten feet to go. Now, however, a grave problem presented itself. How was he to get the remaining dirt from the hole?

After some pondering Doris solved the problem—and a makeshift derrick was rigged up, of a box and a coil of rope, remnants of the former enterprize.

"Last time," he explained as he toiled on, "we had several in the party and it was no trouble to dig. Besides, we didn't go so deep."

Six o'clock came and the hole was at fifteen feet.

"Five more feet to fortune!" laughed Osbourne as he clambered up the rope and out. "Let's lay off and have a bite to eat."

Supper consisted of some tinned goods they had brought with them all the way from America. Then, reinforced, they went down into the dark cellar again and Osbourne recommenced his labors.

At 9 o'clock, with the hole twenty-two feet deep, he paused and climbed slowly out.

"Well, I guess I was born to be poor. There's nothing down there but China—or whatever is under us in this Godforsaken part of the world!"

"You're sure?"

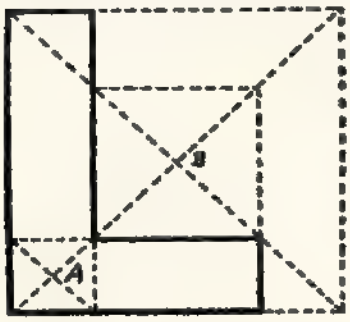
"Do you want to go down and see for yourself?"

"No thanks! But I can't understand. I couldn't have translated the cipher wrong. It was so plain."

They went upstairs and tried to figure it out.

"Say, look here!" cried Osbourne suddenly. "I see it now." He took the sketch of the villa they were pondering over and drew as he talked. The cipher said: 'Dig down twenty feet from mid-point cellar square.' Well, we didn't do it, don't you see? By 'cellar square' he meant the square of the continuation of the foundation lines. In other words,

imagine another L-shaped villa just like this put against it so:



The Square of Jamshyd

Don't you see? We've been digging at the intersection of the diagonals of that little square, at the point A; whereas we should have dug at the intersection of the diagonals of the big square, at B."

Doris studied the diagram.

"Yes," she admitted at length, "I think you are right. How much are you going to deduct from my fifty per cent for making such a blunder?"

Osbourne looked at her swiftly, in indignation, but saw that she was laughing. So he refrained from making a reply.

At first he was for going right out and commencing the second hole but Doris finally persuaded him that it would be best to wait till morning, when they could see what they were doing, rather than risk making a second false move.

So a few minutes later they said good-night and she went upstairs. Osbourne then composed himself on the library couch and, having performed a day's labor that would entitle any man to rest, was soon asleep.

Suddenly—it seemed he had scarcely shut his eyes—he was aroused by the high-pitched scream of a woman. Leaping up, he slipped into a dressing gown and rushed upstairs. Doris stood in the dark hallway in a lacy kimona over pink silk pajamas, holding a lighted candle. She was trembling violently.

"Someone was in my room," she explained in a voice that shook, despite her efforts to steady it. "I'm sorry I screamed—but it frightened me so."

"Could you see if it was a man or a woman?"

"It was a man. I must have heard him come in, for I woke up suddenly, and saw him searching among the papers in my suitcase. When I screamed he rushed out."

"We'll search the place thoroughly tomorrow," he assured her. "Meanwhile, if you're afraid, I'll sleep outside the door."

"Oh, thanks but—really, I'm not so afraid, now. It was the first shock that startled me. I shall be quite all right."

"Very well, then. But if you need me, just call. And if I were you I'd put a pistol under my pillow."

"I already have one there," she informed him. "And—I'm not afraid to use it if I have to!" She seemed to have quite recovered herself. "Only I'd hate to inconvenience any of your guests."

"Oh, I don't mind in the least," he laughed. "Good-night for the second time." And with that he left her.

The remainder of the night passed uneventfully, save that once Osbourne thought he heard sounds from below, in the cellar. But he decided not to investigate until morning.

DAWN finally came, as it always does even in the worst regulated countries—and Osbourne rose, stretched himself and dressed.

"May I come down?" called Doris presently.

"Come ahead—and we'll open up another can of salmon!" he called back.

After breakfast they searched every nook and corner of the villa but found no trace of the prowler, other than a litter of cigarette stubs in one of the upper rooms. Osbourne picked

up one and examined it. It was of a cheap London brand popular among the lower classes.

"I vote we let the fellow go and get down to business," he said, flinging it away.

They went outside and proceeded to measure off on the terrace embraced by the villa's two long arms, distances equal to the arms themselves. When they had done this, pacing the distances as accurately as they could, they measured the two diagonals in the same way and located the spot where they intersected. To their surprize it came exactly in the center of a small floral garden.

"It's a shame to spoil what little beauty there is about this hideous place," muttered Osbourne, when he had returned a few minutes later with pick and shovel, "but here goes!"

Doris stood by while he demolished the garden. Then, as the work proceeded, from time to time she brought him a drink of water. By noon the new hole was down ten feet. But Osbourne wouldn't stop.

"I'm going to dig this blooming thing down the full twenty feet before I quit!" he exclaimed. "Then, if the darned treasure isn't there, it can go to blazes!"

"But do have something to eat," Doris insisted.

In the end she won and he ate a few potted tongue sandwiches which she handed down to him. Then he resumed. The makeshift derrick had been rigged up again and Doris did what she could to help.

In an idle moment, turning toward the villa, she gasped in astonishment. From one of the upper windows a face was peering down at them. Pretending that she had not noticed, she bent over the hole and told Osbourne. He climbed up the rope and looked over the edge. The face vanished. But he had seen it.

"Could you make out who it was?" she whispered.

"No, it was too far away. But we'll get that bird tonight!"

With that he slid back into the hole and recommenced his labors.

At 6 o'clock he was nearing the goal—if goal there was. Suddenly there came a metallic click. Doris, hearing it, bent over.

"What was that?"

"I'm not sure—but I think we've struck it."

He dug on. Two minutes later he called softly. Doris leaned over the edge.

"Can you slide down that rope?" he asked. "I'll catch you."

She grasped the rope for answer and let herself down. He pointed to a slab of rock some three feet square, with a rusted iron ring in it. In feverish haste they brushed away the remaining earth. Using their combined weights on the pick, they slowly raised the slab and laid it back away from the opening. A flight of stone steps led down some twelve feet into a dark cavern.

Flashing the electric torch, Osbourne led the way down. Doris followed, breathless with wonder. The fabled tale of Aladdin came back to her. The world of reality faded away. She was under an enchantment.

They were now in a stone passage, narrow and damp. About everything was the fetor of great age. They advanced slowly, fearfully. Not even the presence of the supernatural could have been more awe-inspiring. They did not talk. They scarcely breathed. The passage ended, thirty feet from its inception, at a great door of solid ebony, carved marvelously and bound all about with heavy gold.

Osbourne grasped its great handle and leaned with it. A moment of terrible uncertainty—then it swung slowly open—and the bright light of

their electric torch threw into relief a spectacle that few men in all time have ever beheld. They stood on the threshold of a stupendous treasure. Great chests, of metal and stone and wood, large and small, lined a square chamber probably fifty feet on a side. They were piled one on top of another to the very ceiling. Some of them were intact. Others, through the slow corrosion of countless centuries, had partially fallen apart, sending their contents cataracting down in a shower of gold and precious stones. The floor was strewn with coins and jewels. Over in one corner a veritable pyramid of silver and gold, rubies and diamonds, sapphires and emeralds and turquoises, blinked uneasily under the brilliant flood of strange modern illumination.

ADVANCING as if into a sanctuary they were desecrating, Osbourne and Doris entered the treasure-chamber. Step by step, slowly and dazedly, they proceeded, as if under the shadow of a spell, feeling that at any moment the whole phantasmagoria might disintegrate into thin haze and waft away.

Doris, pagan in the presence of such overpowering wealth, reached down and lifted up a handful of gold and jewels, letting them fall through her fingers and tinkle to the floor. The echoes resounded queerly—and as they died away there came a dull, reverberating boom, as of a door closing a great way off.

"What was that?" As of one accord they spoke, turning to face each other. As of one accord they looked in the direction of the silent ebony sentinel to the riches of a whole dynasty of plundering kings. But the massive door was open wide on its hinges.

"The trap door at the hole!" cried Osbourne. And with a rush he dashed from the room and along the narrow stone passage to the steps. Doris, following, saw him rush up them and fling his weight against the stone slab, which had fallen. But it would not rise.

Then Osbourne paused, as he heard an ominous sound. Doris had now joined him.

"Listen!"

She listened. At intervals dull thuds struck the upper surface of the stone slab. Someone was throwing earth upon it!

"Trapped! Buried like two dogs!" muttered Osbourne. "That fellow at the window. We should have known better."

They stood a moment more, listening, then he tried the trap door again. But the effort was futile.

Slowly they retraced their steps, and entered the treasure-room once more. There, ruefully, they surveyed the immense wealth that surrounded them.

"Well," remarked Osbourne with a wry attempt at a smile, "here we are, probably two of the richest people in the world—and what does it get us? Children, let this be an example to you. Money does not bring happiness!"

Doris laughed—but the echoes of her laugh sounded hollow and false. They were in a desperate fix and there was no getting around it.

"What a pair of fools we are!" he muttered. "This is just the chance that fellow's been waiting for, failing to find the Cup. He'll shovel enough earth back over the door to hold us, then he'll wait a few days for us to smother to death—whereupon he'll have the treasure all to himself."

But Doris wasn't listening. She had discovered something tremendously more important than what he was saying. Osbourne looked to see her kneeling in the far corner of the room, by the loose mound of money and jewels. He came over.

"It's another door, I think," she explained, working frantically with

her hands to clear away the precious debris. "There's a ring-bolt here. My foot caught in it."

He bent down and they both worked. Presently another trap door was brought to light. They lifted on the ring-bolt and it rose.

"It's our only hope," he said. "Let's go!"

They went down another flight of stone steps and then along a passage even narrower and lower than the other. At times they had to stoop.

"Heavens, it seems endless!" exclaimed Doris fifteen minutes later.

"But it must lead somewhere. They didn't waste all the energy and time required to build this thing for nothing. Hello, there's a light ahead now!" as they turned a sharp corner.

They proceeded on and the light grew brighter. But when they approached its source they saw to their dismay that it was only the tiniest crack, trickling in past a huge cube of rock that completely blocked the passage. Osbourne threw himself against it. To his surprize it yielded perceptibly. He tried it again. But though the giant rock swayed, it would not topple.

He stood off and surveyed it.

"I think," he said, "that if we both pushed we might be able to move it."

"We can only try. I'm afraid I'm not very strong."

But it is surprizing the strength the human body can summon in a crisis. On the third combined lunge against the rock, it gave way, falling outward, where it stuck at an angle. Light now poured in over the top in a broad sheet. Osbourne felt up with his hand.

"I don't know. It's a rather tight squeeze if it's a go at all, at least for me. You'll probably be able to get out all right. Suppose you try first."

So Doris clambered up over the sloping rock—and slid out of sight over the edge.

"Oh, I wish you could see!" she called back. "It's an old palace."

Osbourne now made the attempt, and by the narrowest of margins managed to squeeze out. Then he looked around him. They were in the midst of a vast ruin. Great walls towered up on three sides of them, and the ground where they stood was littered with fallen blocks and columns.

Twilight was falling and the shadows that were gathering gave to the scene an aspect of somber beauty.

"What revelry those ancient kings must once have held here!" murmured Doris.

"Yes, and what revelry I'm going to hold when I get astraddle the neck of that fellow!" muttered Osbourne. "But for the fact that those old birds always had two ways out of a place, we might have spent the rest of our young lives there."

They started off toward the villa, which they could dimly see far over on the other side of the highway, to the left. Back of it an oriental moon was rising, the crescent tilted oddly.

"Don't you think it would be a good idea to put that block back against the passage before we leave?" Doris suggested. "It has evidently hidden the secret of Jamshyd's treasure for centuries. Perhaps it can continue to do the same service for one more night."

So they returned to the massive block and by exerting all their strength were able to lift it back in place. Fortunately, fate had more or less balanced it on a pivot; otherwise ten men could not have moved it.

"There," said Osbourne, "that's done. Now let's go back to the villa. By the time we reach there it will be dark. I think we stand a

good chance of capturing our would-be jailer. Thinking us safely out of the way, he won't be at any pains to conceal himself."

Indeed, even as they turned their eyes in the direction of the villa they saw a light in one of the upper rooms.

"That's the room you found the cigarette stubs in, isn't it?"

"Yes, I believe it is. Now I tell you what we'll do. In order to run no risk of his giving us the slip, we'll come up on him from two directions. You'll go up the front stairs and I'll go up the rear. Have you your pistol with you?"

"No."

"Well, I have two. Here, you take this one—and don't hesitate to shoot. We want him—dead or alive. Preferably alive. I'd like to hear him try to tell his story to these local cops!"

Presently they reached the grounds of the villa.

"You're sure you're not afraid?" he asked her. "If you are, I'll take a chance on landing him myself."

"Oh, no, not at all," fibbed Doris.

Her heart was in her throat already. But she determined she would see it through.

So they parted and each approached the villa from a different direction.

Some minutes later they met in the upper hall, outside the door of the room with the light.

"Funny," remarked Osbourne. "We must have made some noise. He evidently hasn't heard us."

"Perhaps he isn't in the room."

"Well, we'll soon see."

Their conversation, held in whispers, ceased. Grasping the knob of the door, Osbourne opened it. They entered, pistols leveled—to pause in amazement at a most extraordinary sight. Slouched down in a deep leather chair, a clutter of empty wine bottles at his feet, sat an exceedingly drunken man. Osbourne looked closely, saw the man's face.

"My valet!"

Returning the unneeded pistol to his pocket, he came forward and shook the man violently. Under the assault, that individual opened one bleary eye. Something that its blurred vision caught caused him to open the other in haste. Then, with both feeble orbs focusing at random, the form before him gradually took shape on his retina and was telegraphed to a foggy brain. That seemed to clarify the atmosphere like lightning. The man leaped to his feet in terror. But Osbourne shoved him firmly back into his seat. Then commenced maudlin ravings, cursings, pleadings. It was a mixture of delirium tremens and extreme fright. Doris backed away horrified.

"Please go outside," begged Osbourne. "Or—wait a minute. Fortunately father had to have a 'phone in this place, for official purposes. You will find it in the downstairs hall. Call up the police and tell them to send for this man."

Doris did as she was asked. When she returned she found the man quiet and Osbourne standing beside him nonchalantly. She never knew what had taken place between them. She didn't want to.

"I've changed my mind about this fellow," he told her. "I'm going to let him go. He's going right away. By the time the police get here he'll be gone. I've not told him he could go yet, but you just watch him when I do!" He turned to his one-time valet. "Now, my fellow citizen, your presence is no longer required. It will be very undesirable at any time in the future. You may go."

For a man who had lately been under the influence of large quantities of the best liquor, the man showed amazing speed and control in making himself scarce. He vanished from the room as if by magic, there

was a rattle of feet on the stairs, the opening and shutting of a door—and he removed himself from their lives forever.

"But what'll we say when the police come?"

"We'll say he escaped—and we'll ask official protection for our property."

Osbourne thought Doris smiled rather curiously.

"*Our* property?"

"Why, certainly. Didn't I promise you fifty per cent? I told you at the time I was no piker."

Thereupon Doris handed him a sheet of folded note paper. Osbourne took it and glanced at it uncertainly a moment. Then surprize and pleasure lit up his face.

"Why, it's in Dad's writing!"

"I found it down in the treasure-chamber," she explained. "It was stuck under the cover of one of the chests."

Osbourne read:

My dear Son:

You may take this for what it is worth. As you know, I am somewhat of a Persian scholar. When I first came upon this treasure, I discovered an original document in the handwriting of King Jamshyd. The document said in part: "Should man ever chance upon this treasure of me and my dynasty, which I am forced to leave behind me (an evil spirit, Dahak, drove him from his Empire), wo be unto him and let him dread the curse of a Persian king, should he cause it to be divided."

So, my son, it behooves you to keep the treasure intact, as I have done, unless you have the fortitude to brave the wrath of Jamshyd.

God be with you—and may these riches bring you happiness.

Your loving father,
FRANKLYN OSBOURNE.

"So you see," said Doris, "the treasure is yours, not mine. I relinquish all claim to my half."

"Nonsense," laughed Osbourne. "Surely you aren't going to let a silly superstition scare you. Old King Jamshyd's been dead too long to be formidable. Doubtless he's forgotten all about his old treasure, a great while ago."

But she would not be shaken.

"Then," said Osbourne at length, "there is only one thing to do, if you insist the treasure must remain in my family."

"What?"

"You'll have to marry me!"

And she did so.

THE DEATH ANGEL

***By* FRANCIS HARD**

We struggled in the waves, and I was ware
Of a strange presence moving by my side,
More beautiful than dawn, and dreamy-eyed,
Who half enmesht me with her falling hair,
Blacker than night, yet thousandfold more fair;
And with the siren-voice of dreams she cried:
"Forbear to struggle more, but gently slide
Into my arms: new rapture waits thee there."

To that soft plea I would have yielded then,
But tender voices cried into my ear,
And then the sobs of loved ones I could hear;
And so I turned, and fought the waves again.
My comrade from my side she reft away:
I entered into night, he into day.

A Terrible Revenge Was That of Caracol, As Related One Day in "La Même Chose"

JEAN BEAUCE

By W. J. STAMPER

Author of "The Vulture of Pignon," "Lips of the Dead," etc.

IT WAS in an unpretentious and squalid little restaurant in the shabbiest quarter of the city of Cap Haitien that I accidentally became acquainted with a man who knew more about those fearful and tragic times preceding the American Occupation of Haiti than any other living person.

During the later and cooler hours of the day it was my custom to rove about the city in search of fragments of information concerning that dark period of crime and blood, which have not yet been, and perhaps never will be, recorded in the pages of history. On one of these walks I found myself before the above mentioned restaurant. There certainly was nothing to recommend it to a white man as a fit place to seek dinner, but the sign which overhung the door was so utterly novel that it struck me with a peculiar curiosity. It was made of a smooth board on which was the picture of two clasped hands and a French phrase which read as follows:

"*LA MÊME CHOSE.*"

"The Same Thing," I translated, and immediately decided that the person who put out such a sign as this, and manifestly for the purpose of drawing trade, must indeed be an interesting one to meet. That this particular sign had a certain meaning for patrons, I did not doubt for a moment, and hence arose my eagerness to meet the proprietor and learn the secret.

"The owner of this place has a vivid imagination or else knows more about the natives than anyone I have ever met," I thought, as I took off my hat and stepped through the door.

I was not a little surprized to be addressed in perfect English by a thin, olive-skinned man of fifty years as he motioned toward a table at the opposite side of the room.

"Welcome to the American," he said. "It is not often that my humble place is honored by the white man."

"I hope you will pardon me, sir," I answered, "but I must confess that I entered more as a matter of curiosity than for the purpose of dining. The sign above your door is so very extraordinary—"

"But that is a long story," he broke in, "a story that is always unpleasant to recount, touching as it does the most vital chords of my unhappy existence. My friends, such as are yet alive, are acquainted with my story and they come to spend their gourdes at my rude tables, for they know what I have suffered."

I was struck so forcibly by the note of sadness in his voice and a gentility of manner so unlike other Haitians, that I felt a peculiar sympathy welling up in my heart for this alien black man.

"Let us at least have a bottle of wine together," said I, as I walked over and sat down at a table.

As he followed me to the table, I noticed that he appeared nervous.

His gait was halting, and as he sat down, I saw that his right hand was gone and a red stub of a wrist peeped out from his white sleeve. His forehead was broad and intelligent; his lips were thin and finely formed; his eyes were black and piercing. There were abilities in this man which might have given him a high place in any society.

"Petite," he called in his soft voice, "bring the old wine and close the door. There will be no more business today, for I have a guest with whom I wish to converse for a long time."

I had not seen any persons in the room when I entered, but at the sound of his voice, there emerged from behind the curtains at the rear, the figure of a girl, and she carried in her left hand a large tray on which rested glasses and a tall bottle of red wine. As she tripped lightly across the floor toward us, I was astonished by her marvelous beauty. She was lithe and willowy, easy of movement, dark of complexion, and a perfect type of that haunting beauty with which tropical suns touch maidens for a brief period. She wore a flowing white gown and her long black tresses almost covered the rings of old gold that hung from her finely formed ears. She placed the tray on the table, closed the outer door as directed, and again disappeared behind the curtains.

"I know what you are thinking, my American friend," said the host. "She is beautiful, damnably beautiful; but she is the curse of her father," he added, as he poured out the sparkling wine.

"A curse?" I repeated. "I do not understand you, sir, for I have never seen a more beautiful woman."

"That also is a part of my story," he replied, as he lifted a glass to his lips.

We drank in silence; to whom he drank I do not know, but I drank to the strange beauty of the woman behind the curtains.

"I AM Jean Beauce," he began. "I have seen presidents rise and fall overnight. I have seen the crimson stains bespatter the flagstones of every street and the very gutters flow red with human blood. Now to my story.

"My mother was a Haitian negress, my father a Frenchman from Marseilles. He came to Cap Haitien and my mother was his mistress. When I was five years of age I stood with her in the early morning on the promontory of Picolet and watched the white sails of a schooner fade into the distance, the sails that carried him back to France; and I have heard it said that at a drunken carousal the night before his departure, he was chided by some of his friends for leaving his offspring to the gutters of Cap Haitien and he replied with a swaggering jest, 'The boy is a negro. Let him grow up here in Haiti as is fitting. He will be happy in his ignorance as he gnaws his stalk of sugar cane and his mangoes.'

"When I grew old enough to hear of these cruel words, they rankled in my bosom and I determined to make a man of myself in spite of that fate which had hurled me a black and fatherless illegitimate among a heathen people. I was black like them, but a white heart, passionate, proud and ambitious, the heart of a Frenchman, throbbed in my breast.

"Soon after, my mother, broken down with poverty and disease, passed on and left me a homeless and friendless waif among the alleys of Cap Haitien.

"If my youth was any different from that of all these ragged and filthy children you see daily fishing among the garbage on the waterfront for a crust of bread, it was worse; worse because there was in me that

unquenchable spark of pride which was my birthright.

"The age of fifteen found me toiling beneath the heavy sacks of coffee for loading the ships destined for foreign ports. I often wondered as I dropped my heavy load down the dark holds, if my father would drink that coffee. In my labors I had my visions, visions of some day being a coffee king, of controlling all those thousands of pounds of the green berries that daily departed for every point of the compass. I worked; and saved; and starved. But I gradually gained a foothold among the business men of the city.

"The age of thirty found me the absolute ruler of the coffee trade. I was rich; I was happily married to a lady of my own color and was looking forward to a serene and peaceful life of plenty. I was at that time the most prosperous man in the city.

"Then vague rumors came drifting in from Bahon and Ouanaminthe. A revolution was afoot for deposing Callet, the then ruling power of Cap Haitien. I well knew the terrible results of revolution, property seized and confiscated, families outraged and murder stalking naked in the streets of the city. Callet demanded a sum of money from me for the purpose of buying arms for the defense of the city and I was compelled to furnish the funds he desired.

"Caracol was the name of the revolutionary leader, and he rapidly gained ground and at length drew near the city. Rumor had it that this chief had been absent in France for a long time studying military tactics and that he had a number of trained lieutenants with him.

"You can readily see the effect of such reports among the poorly trained and ill-armed gendarmes of Callet. They deserted in companies, and when Caracol appeared before the walls of the city there remained a single platoon of loyal troops to dispute his advance on the palace. From the barred windows of my home I saw the wild and yelling marauders of Caracol surge down the street with flaming torches toward the gate of the palace. Beneath my very window I saw the flash of machete, heard the dull crash of metal against bone, and saw heads bouncing about the street, finally to stop grinning and gaping against the curbstones. Screams of terror and the curses of coarse men were all. Onward this terrible serpent of death made its way, and when it arrived before the palace there were a few scattered shots, the gate went down with a roar, and yelling demons rushed up the staircase to the hiding place of Callet.

"What took place in that room God only knows; but I do know that the next morning a cheering procession passed under my window and in front strutted a huge black, bearing on the point of his sharp lance the gory and reeking head of Callet.

"By official proclamation Caracol declared himself ruler of Haiti and called upon all the men of affairs to present themselves before him on a certain date to advise and confer as to the adoption of a new constitution for the government of the country.

"On the appointed day we appeared at the palace, happy in the thought that a man had at last gained power who would insure the safety of our property and lead Haiti into the path of progress. There were besides myself, Morat, the exporter of sugar, and René, the dealer in castor beans.

"As we stood outside waiting to be admitted, I saw a native arrive carrying three small black boxes, made of coffee-wood. They were beautifully polished, and about eight inches long by six in width. He entered the gate and disappeared into the palace. For some unknown reason I began to wonder what these boxes were intended for. Harmless enough they

seemed, but something about them aroused a sinister dread in my brain. Had you lived in Haiti and seen what I have seen, my friend, you could appreciate the terrible meanings such little things often suggested. I did not confide my fears to my companions but just prayed that all might yet be well.

"We were at length admitted and led up the staircase and through a long, gloomy hallway to a room outside of which was a sign denoting the council chamber. We entered, preceded by a footman, and found ourselves within a vast and circular room. All the walls were hung with a black and velvety cloth; the one solitary window was covered by dark red curtains that billowed unceasingly in the breezes from the bay, and the sunbeams broke through in a faint and flickering light; black carpets in which we sank to our ankles covered the floor—together these ghostly things seemed to betoken nothing less than death.

"Suddenly my eyes wandered toward the left, and there I saw something that made my blood curdle in its course.

"There, suspended to a silken rope which hung from the ceiling, was the head of Callet. The hair was twisted into a knot on top of the head and secured to the end of the rope; the eyes were like milk; the mouth was gaping. As we stared, struck dumb with horror, there was a moaning gust of wind. The red curtains flapped and the gruesome head oscillated back and forth like a great pendulum. Still we uttered no syllable. Then I noticed beneath the head a small, plush-covered mahogany table on which rested the three black boxes I had seen the native carrying before we entered the palace.

"As thus we stood and waited for whatever fate had in store for us, a man stepped softly from behind the curtains and stopped before us in the center of the room. He was bearded, tall and stooping, but a white man.

" 'It is unnecessary,' he said in a hollow voice, 'for me to tell you whose head it is that hangs yonder. Such shall be the fate of those who presume to oppose the will of Jules Caracol. So far as a constitution for Haiti is concerned, I am that constitution, the power supreme. I have evidence that the three of you assisted my late rival in procuring arms to repel my attack, and all your combined wealth is not sufficient to purchase immunity from the hatred I bear for you. Your treachery must be paid for with your blood.'

"He clapped his hands together and soldiers appeared from the curtains on every side, encircling us with flashing bayonets. The dastardly deed had been well planned and no orders were issued.

"Presently one of the blacks dragged from the curtains a block of mahogany wood, in the top of which stuck a gleaming ax. Morat was seized roughly and his bare right wrist placed upon the block.

" 'This is the well-merited punishment for opposing me, fool,' said the bearded butcher.

"As the ax rose high above the head of Caracol, I closed my eyes and shuddered. There was a grinding, crunching sound. I looked and saw Morat's face twitch in spasms of pain as he grasped the bloody stub of his wrist and sought to stop the flowing stream. There lay the lifeless hand and the fingers were spread far apart.

"The same fate befell poor René, and then my turn came. I laid my bare wrist across the fatal block and again closed my eyes. The ax fell and I felt a sickening, dulling pain for an instant. I looked and saw my yellow and severed hand as it lay clenched on the black carpet of the floor. The narrow band of gold on my ring finger shone with a peculiar brilliance.

"Then a terrible and awe-inspiring thing occurred. Though those severed members lay a dozen feet apart, the hands of Morat and René quivered, the index fingers pointed at the butcher, then with a convulsive jump they met and clasped on the black of the carpet as if in solemn promise of friendship.

"There was awful silence in the room. We dared not move, but stood grasping our gory stubs and waited. Darkness fell like a pall. The light on the black table was lighted and shone with weak and unsteady glimmer. The wind flapped the red curtains. The grisly head of Callet spun around and oscillated back and forth.

"Caracol opened the boxes that lay on the table, and then the realization of the horrible thing he intended to perpetrate burst upon me. They were lined inside with white cloth and were shaped for a human hand. With a malicious smile he picked up the hands, and it was with great difficulty that he opened mine so it would fit into its coffin. As he closed the shiny lid I noted that there was a phrase written on it which read: *'LA MÊME CHOSE.'*

"Then Caracol announced in a loud voice to a number of his attendants who had entered as if by previous plan:

" 'These boxes, the symbols of my absolute power over Haitian life and limb, will be opened publicly at the eating and drinking places of the city and then sent to the respective families of these traitors who have opposed my will.'

"It was midnight when we were dismissed to our homes. The terrible order had been executed.

"A NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN day was that next. As I lay tossing in the grip of a burning fever that had seized my body because of the loss of blood and the horror of the previous day, a messenger came to tell me that the minions of Caracol had rifled my vaults and were now on their way to my home. I struggled out of my bed, and as I peered through the casement of my window, I saw that the torch had been applied, and my wealth, the labor of years, was ascending on high in sheets of leaping flame and canopies of black smoke. My servants hurried me away, and from the battlements of Sans Souci I watched with wild and staring eyes my fortune sinking into ashes and ruin.

"Now my home in Despies Street burst into a mass of flame and I wept like a child as my good wife led me out of sight of that awful scene.

"The third day after, we moved farther up the mountain for safety till the wrath of Caracol had cooled. As I lay in my grass hut, a fugitive from the city of my birth and labors, one of my servants, on returning from the market place for food, told me that Morat and René had suffered the same fate as I, but had been smuggled aboard a schooner for South America.

"Six months later I returned to the city with my wife, for my power was broken and Caracol could have no further reasons for molesting me. On the day of our return a daughter was born to us."

Now the old man was trembling and I saw a tear trickle down his withered cheek. He called out in his soft but mournful voice:

"Petite, come to your father."

The curtains moved ever so gently. She came slowly toward us and sank into a chair beside her father. She laid her right arm upon the table, and what I saw made me shudder, for out of her white sleeve I saw moving—*a red and grisly stub of a wrist.*

As the father and daughter bowed their heads and great choking sobs shook their bodies, I quietly arose from the table and walked sorrowfully out of *"LA MÊME CHOSE."*

by Frank Belknap Long Jr.

The WERE-SNAKE

Author of "The Ocean Leech," "Men Who Walk Upon the Air," etc.

"WHAT a perfectly adorable ruin," said Miss Beardsley. "I love deepest gloom, and this place is as mournful as Erebus! The perversity of nature has entered into the rocks; they seem alive!"

"These people worshiped a curious pantheon," I explained. "Ishtar was represented here. Hellish rites were performed on the altar before you. The modern mind cannot conceive them, and to describe them would require the invention of a new language. These piles are older than Stonehenge or Egypt. They antedate the pyramids by thousands of years, and probably go back to the neolithic age."

"Who was Ishtar?" asked Miss Beardsley.

"The great mother goddess, the *magna mater* of the Babylonians, the Assyrians and darker, more sinister peoples whose civilizations were legends in the age of Homer. The worship of Ishtar, variously called Innanna, Nina, Astarte, extended over the whole of Asia; and her altars are to be found in Persia, India, China, Arabia and Siberia. . . Ishtar's earthly counterpart was a woman of devastating beauty, who possessed the cruel and vicious nature of the Roman empress Messalina. In Nineveh, in Tyre, in Erech her terrestrial manifestations lured camel-drivers in from the desert, and destroyed them with kisses. It has been estimated that her victims in a single year outnumbered armies of locusts!"

Miss Beardsley scowled and poked with her parasol among gray, antiquated stones. "It isn't that I don't trust you. But they told me in the village that native girls walk here at night and pretend to be reincarnations of that goddess."

"The native girls are very ugly," I assured her. "They have flat noses and square ears and they wear rings through their lips. No white man could love them."

"I never liked them," murmured Miss Beardsley.

I took Miss Beardsley's hand and smiled into her nervous blue eyes. I found her anger more delightful than the impecunious glory of archeology, but like most stubborn men I invariably sought excuses. "There is no truth in those silly old tales," I said. "But it *is* something to sleep here. The place is haunted and it will give me prestige."

"But what has superstition to do with archeology?" demanded Miss Beardsley.

"We must investigate all superstitions," I responded. "They often furnish us with invaluable data. Lord Clayton-Maddox ignores haunted ruins, and the Royal Society ignores Clayton-Maddox."

"What of it?" pouted Miss Beardsley. I felt that her frivolity did not become her.

"I fear," I said, "that you underestimate the satisfaction of achievement and the value of rewards!"

Miss Beardsley made a gesture indicating contempt. "But they are both quite worthless," she snapped. "In fifty years you will no longer desire them!" She stooped, and picked up a handful of grayish sand. "You will be less than that!" she said.

My guide's eyes sparkled, and he smiled at Miss Beardsley. "It is encouraging," he said, "to hear a woman talk like that. We of the East place less value upon externals. We educate the *soul* and we do not value rewards. With us it is a distinction to remain humble and unknown. We rather despise those who are rich in the world's goods."

"And what is the purpose of such a ridiculous attitude?" I asked.

There was a hint of reluctance in his voice when he answered me. "You Saxons are primitive and uncivilized. You amuse yourselves with absurd toys; you are proud of your bridges and your automobiles, your telephones, and fireless cookers, and your vile, vicious factories; but we seek true culture and understanding. Your culture decayed before the invention of printing. Your middle ages were glorious. You had then great cathedrals, sacred and profane mysteries, magic and holy symbols. You had one great seer who surpassed the ancient East in wisdom. John Dee knew the secrets and terrors that lurk in lonely souls, and had you followed Dee instead of such children as Newton and Watt you might now be in direct communication with the unknown. The true culture of Greece vanished when the philosophers entered Athens; your civilization took the wrong path and perished with the Italian renaissance. You ask me why we educate the soul. We educate the soul to make it strong. When the soul is strong it is able to conquer—but there are things which I can not name!"

"Fiddlesticks!" I retorted. "But tell me, do any nameless things haunt these ruins?"

My guide looked at me evasively and avoided a direct reply. "You will need a knife, Heaven-born!" he informed me.

"And a gun?" I queried.

"It does no good to shoot when you see the eyes. They are invulnerable. But a knife you might find useful."

"A gun should be sufficient," I insisted. "And I do not think that I shall take a knife!"

"You must take a knife, too," said Miss Beardsley. "And if the native girls—." Her eyes hardened, and I saw that there were possibilities and depths in her which I had not suspected.

2

That night I camped in the gray and ominously deserted temple of Ishtar. It wasn't pleasant. The wind swept in from the desert and whistled eerily about lonely altars and dark, amorphous piles. Locusts alighted upon my nose and ears; and they made molasses upon my beard and refused to disembark. Nothing is more repulsive to me than insects, and yet it was no good being angry with them. I sat and dozed, or stared drowzily into the darkness, and thought of the charnel worms which the mad Arab Alhazred bred in the bellies of slain camels. I wondered if I should have the moral courage to face the appari-

tion when it came. It would be necessary to challenge and expose it.

What impressed me above all things was the survival of the Ishtar legend among the natives. I recalled the horrible rites connected with her worship, and curiously enough, I could not rid my mind of a vague longing to sit enraptured at the spectacle of a living sacrifice to the Assyrian pantheon on the dark, ageless altar before me. Like an idiot, I imagined one. The sacrifice took the most loathsome form. The victim was fastened to the gray stone altar by six hooded priests of Ishtar and hacked to pieces with little knives. And while the horrid priests wrought their unhallowed butchery Ishtar smiled, and standing at the base of the altar comforted the victim by stroking his hair.

And yet in spite of Ishtar's cruelty the Babylonians and Assyrians had worshiped her with a curious devotion. Ishtar, I had been told, was so beautiful that no man could look upon her unveiled face and retain the sight of his eyes. Her hair was bronzed, like the sands of the desert near an oasis, and her lips placed the beholder in immediate danger. Men forgot their wives, and sometimes even their merchandise and camels, and fell down and worshiped. All day over the smooth sands processions of men crawled toward her on their hands and knees. Imperial edicts had been levied against her; but men risked death and exile and crawled toward her on their hands and knees. She was more beautiful than the dawn when it comes up all white and purple and fragrant with the odors of paradise. There was something in her movements, in the way in which she held her head, in the curve of her elbow or in the glimmer of light on her tapering ankles that sent a bright, impossible joy into the hearts of her devotees; and no man who had once beheld Ishtar could be satisfied for long with an ordinary woman.

I AWOKE from a dream of Ishtar and incredible, antique dawns and stared into a darkness that shamed the stars. Only in the desert does the darkness thicken, like whipped cream, and stream past with an audible whisper.

The darkness was like a great black beetle covering the world with its wings. No shadows moved in it and no one breathed in it, but the dark itself was alive, and it *whispered*. The night was like an old woman that had given birth to the darkness. Up beyond the darkness sat the mother of the darkness, with her changeling upon her knees. And then in that desolate wilderness of smothering black I saw two luminous green eyes that stared and did not blink.

I got nervously to my feet and told the eyes that I didn't care. The sound of my own voice reassured me. "You are not really the eyes of Ishtar!" I said. "This is some trick—some ridiculous, shameful trick! You take advantage of Americans. But I shall inform the consul. We are not to be trifled with. Our consul has red hair, and he beats his wife and he judges men by the color of their skin. He will not even complain to our government. He will take a delightfully unconventional view of the affair. He has a nervous dislike for impostors. He will fasten you to a post, and pull out your teeth, and tickle you upon the soles of your feet until you scream, and gibber, and a nameless horror fastens upon your brain."

The eyes did not even blink. The eyes were green coals in a whispering void. They stared lidlessly in the dark and I thought: "These are surely the eyes of Ishtar!"

An extraordinary numbness passed over me. It seemed to me then that nothing mattered; and my excitement gradually gave way to a stoical indifference. And yet in the back of my mind there lurked godless horror, and my heart beat with tragic unsteadi-

ness. The eyes were a seal of the unspeakable horror of the night. They confirmed my hatred of the dark, made the dark more mephitic, more vividly malevolent. The eyes emitted two greenish rays, which traversed the dark but did not illume it.

I walked forward toward the eyes, holding out my arms to preserve my balance. Twice I nearly stumbled, and a sharp stone pricked through the thin soles of my moccasins.

The ground was littered with incredibly ancient rocks; and the sand was soft and wet, and it gave beneath me. For a moment I imagined that from somewhere beyond the narrow gray confines of the temple there came a current of sickly, evil-smelling air blowing noiselessly in the dark. I felt the unwholesome warmth upon my cheeks and throat. But worst of all was a sense of evil that enveloped me like a putrid shroud.

I resolved to anticipate the embrace of Ishtar, and I deliberately stared into the eyes before me. They blazed with unconcealed fury. My body sought to rebel and the palms of my hands grew damp with the fear of Ishtar; but my will kept me from the brink of the pit. I thought: "It is very queer that Ishtar does not challenge me. It is very strange that she does nothing but stare with her large soulless eyes." Then I became dumb. I saw that the eyes before me were divided into tiny sections, and the idea came to me that Ishtar's eyes were complex, like the eyes of a fly, and consisted of a million million blazing orbs. The eyes before me were not human!

I RETREATED until my back was against a high, jutting wall. I ran my hands rapidly back and forth across the stone to assure myself that the wall was high and firm. The wall was a protection against the evil changeling of the night. It was a buttress of the visibly strong and real against the shadowy and amorphous. I quietly drew my revolver from its holster and leveled it at the glaring, unblinking green eyes. My revolver could wreck the darkness, cleave it in two, tear it to shreds. My revolver was a symbol of power brought to bear upon evil that sulked, that stabbed in the back.

I sought to orient myself to the unaccustomed weapon. The thought of the sudden, brutal bark of a revolver in that shrouded place seemed a desecration, and my fingers trembled upon the breech. A queer paralysis held me; for a moment I felt like a corpse standing in a shroud. I was tortured by the fear of noise and action, of anything that would unsettle the darkness and make the situation drastic. For a moment I wavered, and turned over in my mind the advisability of going on my knees to Ishtar and asking her pardon; and then suddenly courage swelled within me like a wave.

I dared to press upon the trigger; and the loathsome blackness disappeared in a plethoric glare which swallowed the earth. Nothing existed but an evanescent and transcendent whiteness; and the darkness quivered like jelly and fell away and writhed on the knees of the night. And then from the matrix of the glare came a thunderous report, and sound took the place of light, and the darkness came rushing back. I shut my eyes, and cried out. My knees threatened to give way beneath me. But I thought: "One shot is not enough. I must take care to see that Ishtar does not escape."

I discovered that I had no desire to see Ishtar. With my back against the wall and my revolver throttling the darkness I rejoiced that I could not see—I know not what! But I discerned in the momentary glare low, crumbling walls, and leaning altars, and black, satyrlike faces carved in black basalt, and I was filled with

horror and awe inexpressible, and I thought that Miss Beardsley had concealed strange realization beneath her flippancy. She had tried to warn me: "This place is as mournful as Erebus. The perversity of nature has entered into the rocks; they seem alive."

The whole business looked ugly, and it especially explained the villagers' fear of the temple of Ishtar. There was dead silence for five minutes or more, and then I threw aside the thing of flame that had failed to justify its boast of strength. I heard a metallic ring as it went clattering over the stones. The eyes of Ishtar had moved nearer; and I felt that I had sounded the depths of anguish, and that I now dangled above an unreverberate abyss. Far above me through a fissure I saw the stars, but they glittered so weakly that they seemed to exude darkness and not light.

What if I should go on my knees to Ishtar and entreat her to love me? Perhaps her eyes would grow soft; perhaps I should see her and find her beautiful. The camel-drivers had found her beautiful. They had come in from the desert and she had comforted them with kisses and killed them with love.

"I could love you!" I said to the eyes, and I loathed the sound of my own voice. I knew what I had done, but I should never have spoken to Ishtar had not some force superior to my will persuaded me that utter destruction is more desirable than suspense.

At once the eyes grew immense and soft and tender in the night. They lost their snakelike glitter. They advanced toward me, and I heard a low swishing sound, as if something smooth and soft were crawling on its hands and knees over a rough, uneven surface. A curiously indescribable odor, acrid and necrophilic, came to me on the tiny breath of air blowing noiselessly in the dark. And then from beyond the narrow, gray borders of the temple I heard a sudden, sharp exclamation of fear and pain.

It was a voice of pity and terror in the night, shaming the eyes of Ishtar. It arose from the dark spaces, tender and full of infinite compassion and infinite fear, and it softened the hard edges of the darkness.

"Stay back," I shouted. "I shall take care of this."

The voice rose to a higher pitch; it swelled in the darkness and formed phrases and sentences and pleaded and reproached.

"Oh, Arthur, I warned you! I told you that nothing good would come of sleeping here. Arthur, where are you?"

"Miss Beardsley," I cried, "you must go back. It is nothing. No hurt will come to you."

"It *is* something, Arthur, and I would face it with you. I have no fear, Arthur. There is nothing in the darkness that can hurt us. Only our fears hurt us, and make monsters of the darkness. You must banish fear, Arthur—and I will help you!"

I knew that Miss Beardsley had rounded the gray walls, and that she walked within the temple, directly beneath the lowering, menacing eyes of Ishtar. I saw the eyes narrow and their softness disappear and a cold fury flame in their pupilless depths.

"Arthur!" called Miss Beardsley, and I knew that she stood not three yards from me. I could have stepped forward and touched her in the darkness. "Arthur!" The voice was reproachful and despairing.

I moved forward to intercept her, and I saw the eyes drop and swerve to one side. They struck against something soft, and I heard a sudden, frightened scream; and I knew that Miss Beardsley had been attacked, and thrown forcefully upon the ground.

I left the protection of the wall and went down on my hands and knees,

groping among gray, cutting stones. Surely, I thought, there must be some way of breaking through, of tearing the darkness apart and rescuing Miss Beardsley.

I shivered and moaned and struggled with the darkness, and the most awful terror filled my mind. I pulled myself forward over the sharp stones until my body became one great sore, and my clothes hung in rags and my eyes filled with tears. For it was all dark and indistinct ahead, and I could not reach Miss Beardsley.

Low, choking gasps came from Miss Beardsley, followed by sobs and guggles, and I heard a thrashing and a retching. "This is lethal horror!" I thought. One solitary, tremendous purpose acted like a tonic upon my will. Ishtar was the horror in the night, and I must save Miss Beardsley from her dark, loathsome paws!

I recognized the menace of Ishtar with a new acuteness. The unearthly evil of Ishtar would imperil the soul of Miss Beardsley, for the goddess would not be satisfied with a mere body, an empty husk. I was fighting, then, to save both the body and soul of Miss Beardsley. I struggled forward, trying to murder the dark with my two hands. I suffered pain. In the darkness, in the night, I knew a great hurt. And Miss Beardsley was crying and moaning three yards from me.

It seemed frightful to me, my inability to reach Miss Beardsley. I had climbed and climbed over rough, gray stones, and my hands and knees were covered with blood, but I could not reach Miss Beardsley. She retreated from me. Something was carrying her off, dragging her ruthlessly over the stones.

SUDDENLY my hands and knees went wet. My thoughts became confused, but I knew that I knelt in something wet. It seemed as if I had passed from agony into dumb, unreasoning delirium. I raised one hand slowly out of the wet. I did not confess my fears to myself; I did not openly acknowledge them. Things remained blurred and indefinite in my mind. But in the back of my brain the fear lurked like a panther about to spring.

I raised the hand slowly. I understood dimly that I could not live if the wet confirmed my fear. But it was not blood. It wasn't. Blood was less thick, less cold.

I knew that I knelt in dark slime of the earth. A godless slug that had never seen the sun and moon and stars might leave such slime. I shut my eyes, without precisely knowing why, and my brain became quite quiet. I would go on and on, and find Miss Beardsley!

I crawled forward on my hands and knees over the dark earth. It seemed as if I was going on forever, and yet I knew intuitively that I should eventually find light—and Miss Beardsley. Something that left dark, evil-smelling slime in its wake and that had eyes like the eyes of Ishtar was carrying Miss Beardsley away over the dark. And I would discover its retreat and destroy it utterly. My heart beat wildly, and a buzzing commenced in my brain, but I ground my teeth together, and went on and on.

I followed a trail of foul-smelling slime, and my whole body ached. Formless shapes branched and grew in my mind. I thought aloud: "Will there be no end? Is there no dawn? Will dawn never come up over the desert, all white and clean and radiant? Is there nothing but formless dark that conceals a blasphemous slug that is not human, that leaves slime in its path?"

For the first time I had found voice! I decided to try again, and I pierced the dark with the sharp insistence of my voice. I sought an

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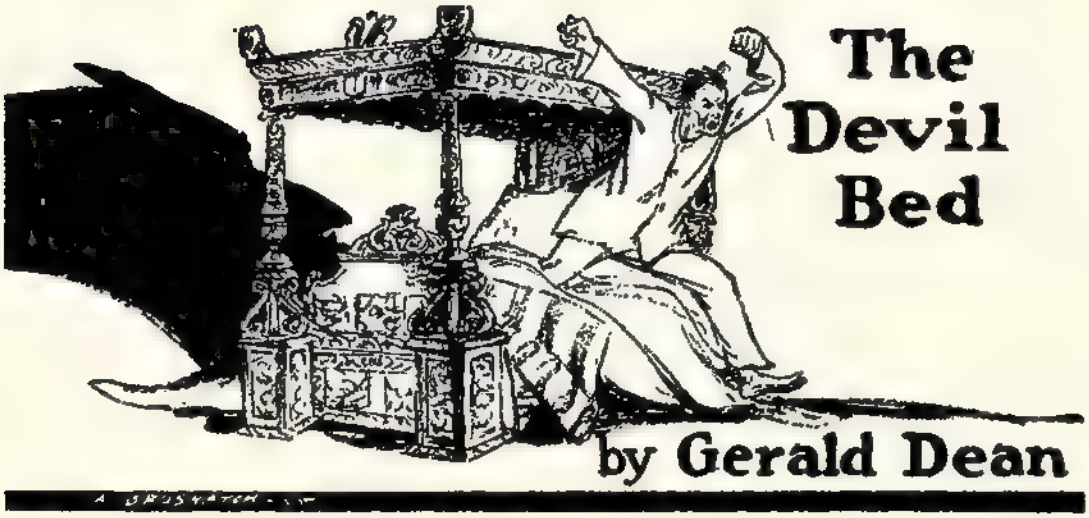

The Devil Bed

by Gerald Dean

I MAY as well state at the beginning that I am not, either by gift or inclination, a writing man; this story must therefore be pardoned in advance for its rough manner of narration, its absolute lack of all literary polish. Fortunately, the fantastic and well-nigh incredible happenings which make up my narrative stand by themselves. They need no furbishing of brilliant phrases, but rather a stark and truthful simplicity for their telling. Let me commence, then, without further apology or explanation.

My name matters little to the story. I am a man of middle age, a bachelor, and fairly successful in the practise of law. The one hobby which I possess is the collecting of Colonial furniture of the earlier periods, and it was through this interest that I first made the acquaintance of Harry Ware.

Harry, unlike me, is rather an unusual fellow. He is, first and foremost, a scholar; widely traveled, tremendously learned and well read. As a friend old Harry is the salt of the earth. I know of no other man whom I would choose in preference to him as a companion and intimate. He is, incidentally, the last male descendant of a fine old American family of English stock, and one of the most discreet and intelligent of collectors of early Americana. What with me is merely a diverting hobby and pastime is to Harry an overpowering obsession —a life-work, almost.

We met for the first time at an auction in White River Junction, Vermont, some eight or nine years ago, on which occasion we fought each other amicably enough, for the possession of an unusual block-front highboy. We returned to New York together, and from then on our acquaintance gradually progressed and developed into the closest and happiest friendship I have ever known. For several years it was our habit, every summer, to make collecting trips together through the South and New England. Once each week during the rest of the year we dined together, alternately at Harry's huge barracks of a place, and my rooms in town.

I REMEMBER that it was on a cheerless and murky morning in early February, about three years ago, that Harry called me up at my office.

"I've got something very interesting to tell you," he said. "If you're not going to be busy tonight, come up to the house." And then, before I could reply: "Why not come straight

out from the office, and have dinner with me?"

I replied that I had nothing else on hand, and promised to be at his home, which is in Fieldston, on the northern outskirts of the city, at about 8 o'clock. I presented myself there, accordingly, at the stated time, and after an excellent dinner we repaired to the library for cigarettes and coffee. I could see that something had happened to disturb Harry's usual calm, sleepy manner; for the first time in my experience he seemed bubbling over with suppressed excitement. As soon as the man-servant had withdrawn, closing the great doors silently after him, Harry extinguished his cigarette and drew his chair up closer to mine.

"Charles," he announced dramatically, "I've had the most unusual thing happen to me—it's like something you'd read about. If it weren't that I have tangible proof, I'd think I'd dreamed it. You can't possibly imagine what it is."

"Well, for Pete's sake, man, let's have it!" I demanded, somewhat testily. "You sound as though you'd seen spooks. What's it all about?"

Harry leaned forward.

"You know the Collingwood scrutoir, of course," he began.

And of course I did. A wonderful and priceless piece of furniture; one of the prizes of Harry's collection, which he has had in his possession for all of twenty years. It stands in his bedroom, and he uses it for a writing desk, but it is willed to the Metropolitan Museum, to be added to that institution's collection after Harry's death. . . . I nodded, therefore, without answering.

"What would you say," Harry went on, "if I were to tell you that I have just discovered a secret drawer in it?"

It was my turn to lean forward. "Not really!" I exclaimed. "When? Where? How?"

"It was quite accidental. You know the desk has been sounded, time and again, for any possible secret cubby holes or recesses—always unsuccessfully. Last night I'd been very prosaically making out checks to pay my various bills, and I reached for one of my old books of stubs in another receptacle. Something happened. . . . I was awkward, perhaps, and lost my balance. Anyway, my elbow struck sharply against a corner, and at the same instant a panel of wood moved smoothly across, and a tiny drawer came sliding out. I think I sat there staring at it for fully five minutes, before I appreciated the evidence of my eyes. Think of it, man, after owning it for twenty years. A secret drawer!"

"It was—empty, of course?"

Harry shook his head. I could see that he was enjoying the whole thing vastly. "No. Interesting and exciting though it was even to discover such a drawer, there was a further thrill to come. The drawer held a miniature and a letter. Wait—I'll get them and let you see them."

For a minute I suspected Harry of tricking me, and believed the whole affair an elaborate joke at my expense. When he returned, therefore, and placed a small miniature in my hand, I accepted it silently and took it over to the table, where I examined it with critical attention under the shaded lamp.

The miniature was undoubtedly authentic—a lovely bit of early Eighteenth Century work, in perfect condition. The portrait was of a boy, a charming, aristocratic, rather haughty youth of not more than eighteen or twenty years. I turned the miniature over. Pasted to the back was a slip of paper, and on it written in characters so faded as to be almost indecipherable, the following words:

Lennox. Born July 18*th*, 1694.
Died, by his owne hande, Aprille 10*th*, 1713.

As I stood there, staring wordlessly at the inscription, a vague pity swept over me; an intolerable sadness for some unknown and long-forgotten tragedy which I could never hope to comprehend. Who was this handsome lad who had, at the age of nineteen, ended his own life? Why, how, and where? . . . . I looked over at Harry, who was watching me from across the room.

"Rather pathetic, eh?" I said bruskly.

He merely nodded. "Yes. Handsome boy, too. I'd like to find out who he was. But here's the prize find —this letter. Read it, and tell me what you make of it."

I took the letter, a folded slip of paper, written apparently by the same feminine hand that had inscribed its tragedy on the back of the miniature. As well as I can remember, it ran as follows:

Kirkwood:

All is well. A merciful God hath seen fit to spare us frightfulle shame and ignominie. No slightest shade of suspicion hath fallen upon Lennox, and he may proceede safely to Philadelphia. He is doubly safe in that the suspicion of the people hath fallen upon a poore half-wit, whom yesternight they did take and burn alive. So once againe the family fate is averted.

Our bond-man, Foulke Barton, goes to Fort La Tour within the week. I give him £50, and household belongings. Alsso, in obedience to your wish, the Deville Bed.

A thousand fonde kisses to you and our poor boy,

ANTOINETTE.

I read this strange letter once, standing up beside the table. Then I seated myself, lit another cigarette, and read it over. Harry still watched me, enjoying my complete mystification. "Well? What do you make of it? Tell me just your impressions?" he demanded, finally.

"I can't make anything of it," I said, in exasperation. "Unless—well, let's see." As Harry waited impatiently, I groped for words to convey my bewildered impressions. "This young man of the miniature—Lennox —has apparently committed a crime, and fled from the scene. A terrible crime, I'd imagine, since the people burned alive a half-wit whom they suspected of it. . . . But the second paragraph is meaningless, to me. What has this bondman to do with the affair? There's no way of telling whether he was an accomplice, or a witness. Yet it seems irrelevant, doesn't it, that the mother should mention his leaving for some fort, and that she gave him household furnishings? And what in the name of all that's holy, is a Devil Bed?"

Harry laughed. "Your deductions are admirable, Dr. Watson," he said. "But I must say that the crime and the burning alive do not interest me. It's the reference to the bed—the Devil Bed—that has me fascinated. Don't you realize that the writer of this letter is probably referring to something that I've been trying to find for years—one of those marvelous old carved oak bedsteads with gargoyle heads that we know were brought over from England by a few wealthy families, and have never been able to trace? Great Kingdom, Charles! Just think! This hidden drawer and this letter may be the means of our discovering one of those beds. I tell you, I'd give ten years of my life, and all I own, if I could be lucky enough to find one, or even part of one. It would be the most wonderful thing in my life. It would make my collection the most famous in America!"

I sat wordless before Harry's unexpected enthusiasm and excitement. To tell the truth, the personal side of the story unveiled by this mysterious letter interested me far more than the reference to the bed. The sinister hints of a nameless crime, its innocent victim, and the unhappy, guilt-burdened Lennox reached out to me across a span of two silent centuries,

and held me enthralled. But I realized that Harry had valid cause to place more stress upon the reference to the bed, that collectors' will-o'-the-wisp. What, after all, did it matter who had committed a crime two hundred years ago? The guilty man had paid the price of his sin long years past, having died by his own hand. But the bed, if it could be traced, was a matter of living importance. . . . Still, how could the fact that one Foulke Barton, a bondman, had taken such a piece of furniture to Fort La Tour, two hundred years ago, lead one to believe that it might be traced now, after such a lapse of time? I said as much to Harry.

"There's just a chance," he replied, quickly. "Just one chance in ten thousand. God alone knows why the bedstead was given to him, but the man must have realized its value, and been overcome by such a gift. Even then a carved bedstead of that type would be worth an enormous amount of money. He, and possibly his descendants, could not help but recognize its beauty and worth. Just think! It may be standing, even yet, in the bedroom of some little New Brunswick farmhouse!"

"New Brunswick?" I repeated, stupidly. "You mean New Brunswick, in Jersey?"

Harry shook his head impatiently. "No! Fort La Tour is the old French settlement in Canada where the city of Saint John, New Brunswick, now stands. I tell you, Charles, if it's the last thing I do, I'm going up to the province and hunt for that bed!"

I remember laughing a little at Harry's impetuous manner.

"Starting tonight?" I asked, lightly.

And then Harry Ware gave me the surprize of my life.

"I've already packed," he said, "ready to leave in the morning. Why don't you skip business for a week or so, and come along with me?"

2

As it happened, I was not in a position at that time to leave the city, my firm was working under heavy pressure and I could not possibly hope to take a vacation. It was rather regretfully, therefore, that I declined Harry's invitation, for the Devil Bed had me interested, and even a wild goose chase can be exciting under certain conditions and with certain companions.

However, I accompanied Harry to the Grand Central Station next day, and wished him the best of luck in his search. Even at the last minute, standing in the noisy train shed, he tried again to coerce me into the hunt. "I'm going to scour every inch of New Brunswick," he said. "Lord knows what other finds I may run across in the meanwhile. Come along!"

I hated to refuse, but business was business, and unlike Harry I was dependent for bread and butter upon my profession. So I let him go, alone, and in the heavy stress of work during the next few weeks I put the whole affair out of my mind completely, so that the secret drawer and the miniature and the Devil Bed faded slightly in my memory, and lost something of the entrancing glamor they had held that evening in Harry's library.

It was sometime during March that I next heard anything of interest from my adventurous friend. He had written me one or two brief letters during that time, describing his various attempts to trace the descendants of Foulke Barton, which attempts had been, so far, a complete failure. Now there came a note that was almost jubilant in tone—the baying of the bloodhound in full scent:

I think I've found them, and strangely enough, through another crime, or rather a series of crimes. This time, it's something rather ghastly. A man named Amos Barton, whom I have found to be a direct de-

scendant of Foulke Barton, was hanged in the prison here in 1848, having been condemned for the wanton murder of (just imagine!) a family of nine people. I've found all sorts of details concerning him and his forbears from the old files of newspapers. They were a bad lot, and Amos wasn't the first to end his days inside prison walls. The whole family, from away back, seemed tainted with homicidal mania, which cropped out every few generations in some atrocious crime. Amos Barton was a farmer, settled in a small place called Rothsay. He was apparently a mild and peaceable man. One night, so the old records say, he ran amuck and slaughtered a houseful of neighbors, against whom he had no discoverable grudge or grievance. When found, he made no attempt to disprove his guilt, and was summarily hanged by the neck until dead, a week later. Justice moved more quickly in those days, apparently. Well, the interesting and hopeful fact remains that he left a family of generous size, which is doubtless scattered through the province. The deuce of it is, they are supposed to have changed their name, because of the disgrace. However, I'm out to find them, and I feel in my very bones that some one of them will be found, and I'll still trace my Devil Bed. Why don't you come on, now, and help in the search?

That letter made a deep and strange impression upon me. I'm no believer in ghosts, the Lord knows; no one could be more skeptical or cold-blooded in that sort of thing than I am. And yet—

Well, I didn't like this constant shadow of murder connected with the Devil Bed. The laughing, charming face of the boy in the miniature rose up before my mind's eye. What evil impulse could have caused such an innocent-looking young chap to commit a horrible crime? What could have made this unknown farmer, Amos Barton, wantonly slay an entire family? What legacy of evil had descended through the Barton family? Was there a pursuing demon—

So far my revery went, and then, with a conscious effort, I turned my thoughts deliberately from the whole affair. Yet the lurking horror remained in the background. I found myself wishing that my friend Harry had never discovered the secret drawer in his scrutoir; had never started out on his mad hunt for the Devil Bed. And I wrote Harry, what was quite true, that an important case forced me to remain indefinitely in New York.

3

And then, perhaps two months later, came a triumphant telegram. The search was over; the Devil Bed had, unbelievably, been found at last. The message was sent from the village of X——. I cannot for obvious reasons give the correct name of the little New Brunswick hamlet in which the bed was discovered.

Come at once. Search successful. Want you to verify and help in packing and crating. Have notified Blank at the museum. Reply immediately when you will arrive. (Signed) Ware.

Of course there was nothing else to do, in the light of my friendship and various obligations to Harry, but to comply. I dropped everything, put my affairs in hurried order, and having sent a wire in response I took the train the next day for Boston.

Harry met me at the station, in Saint John. He was glowing with triumph, almost ecstatic in his delight. "Wait till you see it," were his first words. "Man, I can't believe my own luck! It's too marvelous—the bed, you understand. Almost perfect condition; the most exquisite carving in oak I've ever seen. But I mustn't rave. I mustn't spoil it for you. Just think, though. Out in the hay-loft of an old barn; hidden behind the filth and débris of years. I tell you, when I first saw it I couldn't speak, or think. I just stood there and gibbered like a madman!"

Harry's enthusiasm was contagious. "They're tremendously excited at the museum," I told him. "Are you sure the present owners will be willing to sell?"

He nodded briefly. "Oh, yes. They have no idea how important, how

priceless, it is. In fact, they dislike it." Talking constantly, he led the way from the station to his hotel. It was then early evening—we were to stay at the hotel overnight, and proceed to X—— by train in the morning.

Over our dinner, and later, in my somewhat rococo sitting room, Harry described his search and all its heartbreaking disappointments and failures. "I had the devil's own time, tracing the children of Amos Barton," he said. "There were six of them, five sons and one daughter, and they'd changed their name to Shilling, after their father was hanged. I thought from the first that if any of the children got the bed, it would be the daughter. As events proved, I was right. . . . But, in the beginning, I couldn't find any of them. Lord, what a job! Searching birth records, death notices, newspaper files. Yet the thing had me fascinated, and I couldn't give up. Finally I found them—first one, then another, and so on. You see, there was one thing that made the whole affair comparatively simple; they hadn't any of them left New Brunswick. They're quiet, unprogressive, narrow people. The whole stock seems sort of stunned by the family disgrace and trouble that's followed them so long. Even—"

"But tell me," I interrupted, as Harry fell silent, "how did you finally locate the people that had the bed?"

Harry stretched his long, lanky frame in a spindling gilt chair, and stared up at the ceiling. "Well, there was that daughter of old Amos," he said. "She was the oldest, and the only girl. After infinite trouble I found she'd married a man named Lyons. They'd been married before this wholesale murder affair, and her husband didn't like the disgrace, or else he objected to the sort of family he married into—anyway, he ran off, leaving his wife with a boy about two years old. She left Rothsay, sold the house there, and went into service as housekeeper for an old farmer in X——, named Nagle. The important thing for us is, that she took with her all her household belongings, including the Devil Bed. She must have been canny enough to realize its value. This old fellow whom she went to work for must have taken a liking to her, for they got married, later on, and he left the farm to her when he died. And the boy (Fanny Barton Lyon's son, you understand) took the name of Nagle and got possession of the place when his mother died. So there you are. Tomorrow, at X—— you'll meet him; he's still alive and as spry as a cricket. He's the owner of the bed, and his granddaughter, who lives with him, is the one who helped me find it in the hay-loft. Pretty piece of work, eh?"

I stared at Harry with infinite admiration. "You should have been a detective," I declared. "You're wasting excellent talents in the mere tracing of old furniture." Then a new thought struck me, or rather a thought I had so far deliberately submerged. "Harry," I said, "what do you make of the fact of these—murders? Here are several nasty crimes in connection with this bed, or in connection with the owners of it. Is there—can there be—any *real* connection?"

Harry stared at me, very oddly I thought. He started impulsively to say something, then checked himself.

"Pure coincidence," he said, lightly. "What else can it be? . . . *What are you trying to say?*"

Something angry, something almost furious in his eyes and voice, a strange, half-suppressed rage, made me draw back from him.

"Why, why, Harry, my dear old chap!" I stuttered. "I don't mean a thing. Just a fancy of mine!"

The subject was changed immediately, but I went to bed that night

with somber, undefined horror lurking in the shadowy depths of my consciousness.

4

WE STARTED out early the next morning, complete harmony restored between us, and arrived about noon at the little village of X——. From there we took a carriage, hired at a local livery stable, and drove out through pleasantly hilly and wooded country to the Nagle farm. It was an unkempt and run-down place, hidden snugly between low, rolling hills; the farmhouse itself a dull, indefinite-looking yellow building, with barns and outhouses in an almost inconceivable state of dilapidation.

As our carriage drove up, a huge mongrel dog darted out, barking vociferously, and ran along at our horse's heels. A moment later a sturdy young woman came out to the side door, and called the dog away. Behind her I could see an old wizened man, who later came hobbling down the pathway to our carriage. His faded eyes stared at me in blinking amazement, and at our introduction he bowed and scraped most obsequiously. I, in turn, stared back at him. So this was the descendant of that almost mythical bondman, Foulke Barton, and of the strange murderer, Amos Barton! Well, there was nothing of murderer about this poor, doddering old nondescript, surely. The girl, his granddaughter, Sophie, rather pleased me. She was a rosy-cheeked strong young thing, and whatever the outside condition of the place, the interior, due to her efforts, was spotlessly clean and tidy.

I was shown to a pleasant though sparsely furnished bedroom, but almost before I could set my luggage down, Harry was insisting that I come out to see the Devil Bed. He had, himself, gone straight to the barn as soon as we arrived, to assure himself that his discovery was quite safe. Now, his suit powdered with cobwebs and dust, he stood in the doorway, commanding that I hurry.

Nothing loth, I followed him down the narrow staircase and out through the back yard to the barn. The place seemed unusually dark and gloomy after the cheerful radiance of out-of-doors, and my eyes, blinded by sunshine, were at first unable to make out my surroundings. Gradually becoming accustomed to the dimness, I looked about me. Rusty rakes and hay-forks leaned disconsolately against the sweating walls, and the empty stalls were piled high with discarded farm machinery of all sorts. Though the place had obviously been long unused, a faintly ammoniac odor filled the air, struggling through a dank, mildewed atmosphere, and creating a ghastly combination of filth and decay. At the rear of the barn stood a ladder that reached up to the hay-loft above. Harry ascended this, deftly as a monkey, and I followed, protesting faintly; my hands were reluctant to take hold of the dirt-encrusted sides. At every step, huge spiders drew back cautiously into quivering webs, and as I halted for a moment at the top, I experienced again that strange, indescribable fear which had tormented me the night before. Then I threw the unreasonable horror from me, and stepped up into the hay-loft.

There, in a pale, hazy light, stood the four carven pieces of oak that made the Devil Bed. Harry had pulled them out from their ignominious hiding place to the center of the loft floor. For an instant, as he had done, I merely stood there looking at it, and "gibbering like a madman." The bedstead was truly a gorgeous thing, the most marvelous piece of furniture I have ever laid eyes upon. Only those who love the rare and exquisite work of old-time craftsmen, who gave their whole lives to the fashioning of beautiful objects, can

understand the thrill that tingled through me. Never, anywhere, have I seen human handicraft of greater loveliness.

And then, even as I stood there, that perfect feeling of delight passed, and a chill came over me. For there was something nameless, something horrible and full of evil coming to me, like a sluggish wave, from the direction of the Devil Bed. I came closer to it, staring intently. The carvings that at first glance were so admirable in their perfection, I now saw to be of a most perverse and suggestive obscenity. Here were strange, writhing forms struggling in bestial embraces; snakes, knotted and upreared; a thousand morbid visions emanating from an unclean mind. . . . And all the while, the power of that evil, hypnotic spell drawing me! . . . I looked up, suddenly, as one does who feels the steady gaze of human eyes. And then I saw what had, undeniably, given the Devil Bed its name. All along the sides of the tester ran a carved series of faces, the evil, the vileness of which, I can never hope to express. Contorted, leering faces; faces of imbeciles in lustful paroxysms; faces only half human, yet doubly disgusting in their perverted humanity. The most hideous gargoyles of Gothic architecture were angels of serenity beside these frightful visions. No nightmare could evoke a more terrible crew.

And then, abruptly, came Harry's triumphant voice. "Well, what do you think of it?"

It was with a definitely physical effort that I drew my eyes away.

"Marvelous, but how evil!" I cried. "No wonder they called it the Devil Bed. . . . It's—Harry, can't you see?—it's wicked! It's the most wicked thing I've ever seen."

He brushed me aside. "Yes, perhaps so. Perhaps you're right. It's hardly the thing to grace a Victorian bedroom, eh?"

A thin, mocking laughter filled the hay-loft, and tinkled into silence. I looked up. The leering lips of the grimacing devil nearest me seemed still curved in malicious scorn. Yet it must have been Harry who laughed.

Something within me protested. "It's a gorgeous piece," I said slowly, almost grudgingly. "You're lucky, Harry, to have discovered it. And yet it seems to me that it were better if it had not been found. It's decadent. It hasn't the splendid sturdy quality I had expected to find in it. I'm disappointed."

No sooner were the words said than I regretted them. For Harry glared at me with a rage and contempt beyond words. His face, usually so pale and calm, was mottled with angry red, and his eyes fairly bulged from their sockets. I think he suspected me then of the rankest jealousy.

"Doubtless I should leave it here," he suggested, furiously. "Or better still, burn it up, because it offends your prudish taste! Or perhaps you're afraid of it?"

And then, instantly, I knew that Harry had hit upon the truth. I *was* afraid of it. As God is my judge, I hated and feared that inanimate thing—that mere bulk of carved wood! And I felt, somehow, that Harry was afraid of it also, and was masking his own inexplicable horror behind this false indignation and bravado. For neither of us would, or could as sane men, admit the truth.

"We're talking nonsense," I said. "It's undeniable that you've made the discovery of a century. The bed is far too valuable to be destroyed, and it will make a tremendously interesting museum piece. I only know that I dislike the ornamentation, and that I wouldn't sleep under those faces for a fortune!"

Harry eyed me curiously. "It's odd that you should have said that," he remarked. "Because I intend to

rope up the bed, and sleep in it tonight, myself."

5

THERE was no deterring him. He had made up his mind, and like many men of his type he was as immovable in his intentions as a block of granite. I don't know what subconscious premonition made me attempt to dissuade him, but at all events my vague objections were quite ignored. Harry had determined to set the Devil Bed up in one of the farmhouse bedrooms, and he carried out that purpose without further discussion.

Between us, with infinite pains and precautions, we carried the tremendously heavy pieces down that tottering old ladder, out into the yard, and into the farmhouse. I remember that the old man and his granddaughter watched us closely at our task, but made no offer of assistance. When the bed was finally set in place in the spare room, its bulk filled almost every inch of available space, and it towered aloft, barely missing the ceiling. Harry and I stood together in the doorway, breathing gustily from our efforts. I must admit that here, between practical, sunny walls, something of horror and mystery seemed to have departed from the great bedstead. The carven heads were just as appallingly hideous, but less terrifying. I remember thinking that I had been rather a fool to have felt any horror of the thing. After all, a bed was nothing but a bed, no matter how peculiarly ornamented, and if Harry wished to sleep in it, what possible harm could ensue therefrom?

A minute later we went downstairs to supper in the best of spirits. The table was laid in the kitchen and Sophie bustled cheerfully to and fro, serving us. As I ate, I marveled at the equable manner in which Harry and I had been accepted in this quaint home. Even the mongrel dog had become friendly, and now sat at Harry's feet, begging for an occasional scrap with pleading eyes. Through the window at my right, I could see the old man pottering about in the yard, puffing peacefully at a villainous-looking pipe. In this simple, homely atmosphere, how shadowy and far away seemed the annals of horror and bloodshed connected with the Barton clan! And how ridiculous seemed my own vague fears of the Devil Bed!

When we had finished our meal, Harry called to Sophie, with whom he was plainly on the best of terms.

"I wonder whether you have a spare mattress for the old bed," he said. "I intend to sleep in it tonight."

Sophie had been standing in the doorway, looking out into the yard. At Harry's words she swung around, and her face turned slowly paler and paler, until it was almost gray in the half-light.

"Oh, Mr. Ware," she said. "You're not going to—to sleep in it?"

Harry laughed irritably. "Yes. Why not? Are you afraid of it, too?"

I waited what seemed an interminable time for the girl's reply. Sophie stood immovable for a moment, then she came quickly over toward us, and stood gripping the edge of the table.

"Yes, I *am* afraid of it," she said, simply. "I've always been, and so has all our family. We've even been afraid to destroy it. There was an old French priest who saw it once, and he said it was unholy. There's a curse'll fall on anybody who sleeps in it. Oh, Mr. Ware! Buy it if you want, and put it into a museum for people to look at, but don't sleep in it. Something terrible will happen to you. I *know!*"

There was a certain quiet earnestness in the girl's voice that brought back to me, with sickening force, all

my own indefinable dread. I hoped against hope that Harry would accept her warning. But his first words showed that hope to be vain.

"There's nothing you could have said," he returned, lightly, "that would have made me more determined to sleep in the bed. I tell you, Sophie, that you and other people have allowed yourselves to be frightened by the cowardly superstitions of priests and old women. Don't think me discourteous in saying this. I know how ghost stories can persist, unreasonably, from one generation to another. A horrible tragedy is often connected with an inanimate object, but I for one have no faith in such nonsense as haunted houses, and accurst beds. How much will you wager that I sleep better tonight, and have better dreams, than you or my friend, here—either of you?"

Sophie seemed to realize that there was nothing more to say. Without answering she turned away and went upstairs. Half an hour later she came out to us, where we were smoking and chatting on the porch in the fragrant dusk, and announced that the big bed was ready to be slept in.

6

And now I come to that part of my story which must tax the credulity of the ordinary reader. I can only say that these eyes have seen the sights I tell of; these ears have heard the sounds.

At 9:30, Sophie and her grandfather having gone up to bed, Harry and I extinguished our last cigarettes and walked upstairs together. At the door of the spare room where the Devil Bed had been placed, we paused and stood for an instant. Then Harry pushed open the door and went in, and I followed him.

The bed filled the room so completely that no other piece of furniture save a plain wooden chair could be squeezed in. On this one chair Sophie had placed a small kerosene lamp with a plain glass shade. A thin, flickering light drifted across the carved surface of the bed, so that the gargoyle faces seemed ever leering out into the light, and then withdrawing into obscene darkness again. The bed, in that first hurried glimpse, struck me as more ghastly than ever before. I can only say that it seemed —living.

I commenced speaking hurriedly, stammering in my excitement.

"Harry! Call me an old woman—an old fool—anything you want!" I said. "But don't sleep in that infernal bed. I don't believe in ghosts or spooks any more than you do, but I tell you this thing has *got* me!"

Harry shook his head obstinately, without answering.

Yet I couldn't give up.

"Humor me this once, for old friendship's sake," I pleaded. "Sleep in the bed some other time. Not tonight."

"This is my only chance," Harry replied. "Tomorrow it is to be crated, remember. And once in the museum—well, I couldn't very well sleep in it there! No, Charles, my mind is made up." We looked at each other for a moment, in complete silence. Then Harry stepped closer to me, and gripped my shoulder. "Don't think me just an obstinate fool!" he said. "I have reasons—for wanting to sleep in the Devil Bed! If you could guess the things I've heard whispered—and it's all nonsense, Charles! Nonsense!"

"You're quite sure?" I said, grimly.

"Positive! But the only way to prove it, is by sleeping in the thing myself. So—good-night, Charles, old fellow! We'll be laughing over this scene, tomorrow morning at breakfast!"

There was no use in wasting any further words; I bade Harry good-

night, and went to my own room. Here I undressed, and lay down. For a long time I remained awake, listening for—what? Eventually, I fell into a restless sleep.

Some hours later, I was awakened suddenly by a most strange and dreadful sound. It can be described only as something between a scream and a howl, and it was not human. . . . I sat up in bed, trembling all over. And at the same time a queer relief came over me. Here, at all events, was actuality at last and no matter what the horror might prove to be it was better than blind dread and waiting. I got out of bed, stumbled across the room in the dark, and lit my lamp with shaking fingers. Then, barefooted, holding the lamp high, I hurried out into the hallway.

The house was now absolutely still. I went first to Harry's room. The bed was empty, and I knew that Harry must be connected in some way with that fearful, agonized, inhuman cry. . . .

At the head of the staircase I halted for a moment, then slowly descended. Since I was quite unfamiliar with the house, I was unaware that these were the back stairs which would lead me to the kitchen. There was not the slightest sound to be heard anywhere —yet I felt, I *knew*, that someone was crawling about, somewhere, in the turgid darkness below.

At the foot of the stairs I met with a closed door. I threw it open, and then stopped short on the threshold. The feeble rays of the lamp showed me that I had found what I sought. On the floor of the kitchen, in a spreading pool of blood, lay the unfortunate mongrel dog whose death scream I had heard. And facing me, his back to the wall, stood Harry, the lamplight flickering on the wet blade of a carving knife he brandished in his hand!

May I never again see, in dreams or in reality, such a face as Harry presented then to my horrified gaze! His eyes were wide and staring—his lips curled back in a snarling grimace. If I had never before seen blood-lust and fury in a human face, I saw it now. . . . Just an instant we looked at each other, then he came hurtling toward me. I knew him for a maniac, and I set down the lamp, and grappled with him for the possession of the knife.

He was too strong for me. Ordinarily, I could have conquered and disarmed him, for Harry is a lighter man, and possessed of less physical strength. But now he was not a man; he was a killer, and he had gained the terrific force of a maniac. In the implacable grip of his hand about my throat I felt that my last moment had come; I could see the knife in his right hand poised for the thrust that would mean my death! Then, suddenly, I heard running feet on the stairs behind me; a woman's sharp cry, and the deafening explosion of a revolver shot. At the same instant, Harry's grip on my throat relaxed, and he slid grotesquely to the floor. I turned, weak and shaking, toward the direction from which the shot had come. Sophie stood there, at the foot of the stairs, with a smoking revolver in her hand.

"I had to kill him," she cried, hysterically. "I had to kill him, or he would have murdered us all."

7

HARRY did not die. The wound which Sophie had given him, and which had saved my life, was merely a deep and extremely painful flesh wound in the shoulder, from which he soon recovered.

But the shock to his nervous system —to his very mind and soul—went deeper. It was only after many days of rest that he could bear to speak of the terrible experience through which he had gone.

And then, strangely enough, he had nothing to tell us which we did not already know. He remembered nothing, from the time he fell asleep in the Devil Bed, till the moment when he dropped to the floor wounded by Sophie's shot. What malignant and mysterious impulse had entered his body, guiding him to the kitchen, putting the knife in his hand, filling him with a fierce lust to kill—he could no more guess than we could. His amazement and horror when we told him what he had done were unspeakably piteous to see, as was his utter remorse over the stabbing of the hapless dog.

"I didn't know what I was doing," he kept repeating dully, over and over. And my mind flashed to the boy Lennox, who also had killed, and all those notorious members of the Barton clan, who had swung for dreadful murders of which they were, in a deeper sense, completely innocent.

On Harry's recovery, there remained but one thing to do before our return to New York. The Devil Bed was taken apart, and hauled unceremoniously to the yard, where we burned it. Not again should this accurst thing bring death and tragedy to innocent victims! Sophie and Harry and I watched it burn, in silence. The flames licked hungrily about those leering gargoyle faces, and we shivered a little, for the eyes seemed almost human. So heavy was the wood that it took hours before the last vestige of it was destroyed.

There is still one thing to tell. As I was hacking the bed apart for easier burning, I found a crude scrawl carved in the under-bracing of the tester:

BLOODE WARM AND RED
ON HIS HANDS THATTE CARVED THIS BED.
BLOODE SHALL BE SHED
BY HIM WHO HEREON RESTS HIS HEAD.

Doggerel? Curse? Joke? Who knows! . . . . For an instant the old chill and horror went through me as I read it, then I tossed the piece vindictively into the flames, and it too was consumed.

In WEIRD TALES Next Month

The Eternal Conflict

A Complete Novelette

By NICTZIN DYALHIS

A remarkable story of the conflict between good and evil forces—a story of whirling chaos and flashing stars—with a vivid picture of Lucifer himself, the Evil Genius of the nethermost spaces of the universe.

By the Author of

"When the Green Star Waned"

ON SALE AT ALL NEWS STANDS SEPTEMBER FIRST

From a Cigar He Learned the Truth About An Affair That Ended in Murder

Ashes of Circumstance

By J. U. GIESY

Author of "The Magic of Dai Nippon"

"COME!" said the chief of police in response to a rap on his door.

An orderly entered.

"Chief, there's a man outside says he has information about that Arnaut business last night. He won't give it to anybody but you."

The chief puffed at the cigar he was smoking and nodded in decision.

"Show him in," he directed.

The orderly withdrew.

Presently the door opened again, to admit a dark-complexioned man with skin as sallow as yellow wax under the morning light. Dark eyes lurked at the back of shadowed sockets. He paused beside the end of the chief's desk.

"If I am correct," he began, speaking without any preliminary greeting, "your men were this morning summoned to the residence of a man known as Jean Arnaut. They found the dead bodies of a man and a woman in the drawing room of the house. The man was lying on the floor. The woman was decently placed upon a couch. She was Arnaut's wife."

The chief nodded again.

"You're correct enough," he said slowly. "Absolutely correct. They said you knew something about it. It appears they were right. Well?"

"Permit me to sit down."

His visitor sank into a chair.

"I would ask that you allow me to tell what I know in my own way. You see—I've taken all night to make up my mind as to my course in this affair. I've known Arnaut rather well for years.

"The double murder—for it was murder, chief, occurred last night. It was the climax of months of mental agony for Arnaut. But I am sure he never dreamed what real agony was until the last twelve hours. Do you know much about him, chief?"

The chief shook his head.

"At least you probably know that he is a man of large interests which frequently require his absence from the city for days at a time. He is rich. His home was such as gives one an instant appreciation of the owner's standing, if you know what I mean. At the time of his marriage, Jean spared no expense in preparing it for the reception of his bride. He wanted it to be, if anything, more beautiful and charming than the one she left—"

"Wait," the chief interrupted. "Why are you telling me all this?"

"Why?"

The man before him met his regard in what seemed a vague surprize.

"Why—because of what happened last night. Arnaut's wife was a beautiful woman—a woman in a thousand—the only one who ever stirred Arnaut's pulses. When he met her, he went mad. She became the main reason for his existence from that instant. And because she was the one

woman, Arnaut, I think, became insanely jealous of her. Not that there was any reason for it, really, but that he fancied all other men must look upon her with his eyes. It was not that he did not trust her. She was a good woman, chief. It was just that he felt as the wearer of a priceless jewel may feel, when he knows that others envy him its possession. It was a sort of possessive fear that Arnaut felt. That, of course, was—at first.

"Arnaut, chief, is a peculiar man. Despite all his mad passion for his wife he gave little sign of what he felt. He is one of those men whose inner emotions do not easily disturb his surface. So while his love burned at a white heat within him, he was not given to outward manifestations of affection. He sought rather to act than to talk his love, to show what he felt by giving her everything she wanted, gratifying her every desire. His greatest delight was to find something he knew she wished and bring it to her. His love was a shrine at which he worshiped, and his wife was the madonna in that shrine. That, chief, is how Arnaut loved."

"You must have known him very well, to know so much," the chief suggested.

"I did. I was closer to him than any other, chief."

"But—what are you leading up to?"

The chief's cigar had gone out. He laid it aside.

"To what happened last night, and —the cause."

The chief leaned back in his chair.

"All right. Go on."

"Arnaut had a friend, chief. His name was Paul Leiss. They had been boys together. They had gone to school together, and in later years they remained bosom friends. Leiss was a single man. But after his marriage Arnaut took him to his house and presented him to his wife. What foul fiend of evil laughed at the step, only the powers which laugh at us mortals can know. Yet for a long time, everything remained as it had been. Paul was frequently at the house, and often when Jean was out of town, he escorted Mrs. Arnaut to places of amusement or to social functions. He and she became very good friends.

"It was then that Jean's jealousy began to manifest itself, chief. He watched the growing intimacy between them with a smiling face that none the less masked the first stirrings of suspicion. Remember that he was a man of the world, and knew of other instances of a friend's forgetting his honor. One may say that his love and primal faith in his wife should have sustained him, but we—you and I—of the world, chief, also—know that jealousy is an insidious thing which feeds on little. Jean Arnaut became suspicious of his friend first, and then of his wife. In such a man, if the fire of love is hot, the fire of jealous doubt is as the flame of hell itself.

"Yet so far as I know, no one suspected. There was no reason why anyone should. It was there that the man's ability of repression showed itself. He still met Paul as always. He still treated his wife as he had treated her from the first. But he was watching — watching. Never an instant, when he was with them, but that his eyes were seeking a covert meaning in a glance, his ears listening for a veiled suggestion in a phrase. With the stealth of a prowling animal he kept his gnawing secret concealed, by a smile, and—watched. He even found a terrible pleasure in watching; in thinking that all the time they fancied him blind, he was looking on from what amounted to a screen. I am not saying that he was not warped in his judgment. He was. His jealousy of

the beautiful woman he had married perverted his sense of proportion until every act, every word, took on a double meaning to his morbid fancy. But he thought then, sincerely, that he was justified in his suspicions. So —the result is as you see."

"You knew of this insane jealousy?" the chief inquired.

"Oh yes!" His visitor inclined his head.

"And let it go on—made no effort to stop it?"

"On the contrary, chief. I have labored with Jean for hours. He could see nothing save his suspicions —would consider nothing else."

"Go on," the chief prompted.

"One day Arnaut came home from a trip. That evening his wife related to him her life in the interval he had been absent. She spoke of Leiss again and again. Suddenly Arnaut turned upon her. He was drunk with rage.

" 'You care more for him than for me!' " he cried.

"She laughed. He pressed for an answer. After a time she resented his attitude. She told him that his question was an insult, which she would answer by refusing to discuss the matter further. You see she had pride.

"The episode, however, was but the pouring of oil on the fire of Arnaut's suspicion. From that instant he began planning a trap for the two, that he might face them in the perfidy he was now convinced was theirs. And yet—so wonderful was his craft, which amounted to insane guile—he was still outwardly much the same, gave no definite sign of the terrible thing in his soul. Only when alone did he pace the floor, grimacing, mouthing, swearing terrible oaths, till a froth gathered on his lips, and his eyes were bloodshot, and his tongue hot with fearful words.

"He laid his trap. It was nothing new. Merely he announced a journey —and on the night when he was supposed to be leaving the city he dined with Mrs. Arnaut. Never had she appeared more desirable, more alluring, more a thing to be adored. But he hardened his heart to his purpose and after dinner he went with her to her boudoir and sat in a chair by a little table, while he smoked a cigar.

" 'Paul coming tonight?' " he asked, watching her through a half veil of smoke.

" 'Not that I know of,' " she told him. She was in a soft negligee—plainly dressed for an evening at home.

"It should have meant nothing to Jean. Paul often came in unexpectedly, as he knew. But this time he had kept all mention of his projected trip from his friend, because he wanted to feel sure of the woman's guilt—that she called her lover to him, after he himself had gone. Hence into her words he read evasion. He nodded, got up and bade her good-bye. He left the house, saying he was going to his office for some papers and then to his train.

"In reality he never went beyond the end of the block. There he stopped. Crouched in the shadow of a railing, he watched his house.

"AFTER a time a figure came down the street, and a man ran up the steps. Arnaut recognized the figure and carriage of his friend, Paul.

"For what seemed a long time after that, he still crouched where he was, nursing the terrible thing in his brain. Yet he kept sufficient control to adhere to the plan he had made. He meant to give them time to feel sure of his absence. At length he stepped out of the shadow and walked to the house, went up the steps and entered with his night key.

"His wife and Paul were sitting in the drawing room as he came in. Even then he noticed how beautiful

she was. The next instant, however, his contempt for her treachery came back in a burning flood to his soul. He strode into the room and paused.

" 'Jean!' his wife cried out.

"Perhaps she was merely surprized. Perhaps for the first time some of Arnaut's control relaxed, and she saw something of his inner state peering at her from his burning eyes. Jean doesn't know, and he never will learn —now.

"Leiss rose. 'Hullo,' he said. 'We thought you'd left town, old man.'

"By an effort Arnaut steadied his voice. He explained that he had missed his train."

"Hold on!"

The chief leaned suddenly forward.

"See here—if you know that, you must have seen Arnaut since the murder."

"I have."

His informant's tone was matter of fact.

"Then—you know where he is now?"

"Yes. That is what caused me to spend a sleepless night—at least in part. I was trying to decide what to do about Arnaut."

"There is only one thing you can do."

The chief's finger crept toward a button on his desk.

"Tell me where he is at once."

"He will not escape." His visitor raised a hand. "Wait but a minute longer, chief, till my story's done. Arnaut left his wife with Leiss. He made an excuse of going to his room. But instead of doing so he went hastily to his wife's boudoir and began a search for any sign which might indicate his friend's prior presence in the room. He found it! On a little table which held his wife's basket of fancy work —she had a pretty taste, was always making pretty things—he found a white pile of tobacco ashes, staring up at him from the darkly polished wood—proof that a man had been admitted not so long before.

"His lips writhed for a moment, baring his teeth like the fangs of a wolf. He fairly ran to his own apartments, dragged out a drawer and procured a weapon. With it he returned to the drawing room. His mind was made up. He was going to kill Leiss. But first he meant to tell them both how he had watched, watched, watched, for months.

"Leiss was on his feet when he entered the room for the second time. He spoke as Arnaut appeared.

" 'I was just leaving, Jean. I only ran in for a moment on my way to the Greenville reception. I must be getting on.'

" 'Wait. I want a word with you.'

"Arnaut held up his hand. And then, like a man slipping the leash of a savage dog, he relaxed all the restraint which had held him. All his foul suspicions, all his fancied proof, all his agony of soul, all his love for his wife and his friend turned to hatred, he poured out upon them in a wild flood of rage and despair.

"In the midst of it, Leiss sought with a face of horror to stay him.

" 'Jean! Jean—you are mad to talk like this,' he cried. 'Stop! I will not permit even you to insult the woman who is your wife, in such fashion. If you were anyone save my old friend, I would strike you down for a great deal less. You—'

"Arnaut turned upon him with a frightful imprecation. He cursed him and he cursed his wife. And suddenly drawing his weapon, he shot Leiss through the chest, so that he staggered and fell upon the floor. And at that he laughed, and turned on his wife, who had screamed and was cowering back beyond the body.

"'There!' he shrieked at her, pointing to it. 'There is the thing you loved! Look at it and see how lovable it is—now!'

"'Oh—my God!' said his wife. 'You believe that—really believe?'

"And she stretched out her hands like one groping in darkness and swayed on her feet.

"Arnaut answered her with a string of accusing oaths. But she was brave—brave. Arnaut admits that. Suddenly she drew herself up. She was very pale, and her eyes were wide. But her words lashed back at him in scorching scorn.

"'Then—why don't you complete your work?'

"Arnaut says she stretched out her arms. He says her eyes, her face, will haunt him to the grave. But then he was mad—utterly mad. He lifted his smoking weapon and pointed it at her, and with what seemed to him then as absolute deliberation he fired.

"She swayed before him for a moment, and a spot of red grew on the filmy fabric of her gown. Then, then she bent forward slightly and coughed. Red blood spattered from her lips. 'Jean!' she choked, and fell on her knees, on her face.

"Arnaut nodded. He was quite satisfied. He had made all his plans. Yet even as he put his weapon away, something made him stoop and lift her up in his arms, and lay her on the couch. Having done that he straightened her limbs and composed her hands. She was still warm, seemed scarcely more than asleep. Then he walked out of the room without a single backward glance, and turned off the lights at the switch.

"All his rage had left him. He decided to leave the city at once. Going to his room, he took up the bags he had packed earlier in the day and started to leave the house. As he passed the door of his wife's boudoir, he noticed that the lights were burning. He set down his bags and stepped inside to turn them off. Then for the first time he saw what before had escaped his attention. It was a half-smoked cigar lying on the floor in the shadow of the table on the top of which he had seen the ashes. He crossed to it and picked it up. The band about it showed it to be one of the brand he habitually smoked.

"Suddenly, chief, as he stood there holding it in his hand, he began to tremble, because of a terrible thought. His supply of cigars was kept in his own room, in a cabinet to which he held the key, and which he always kept locked. He put down a finger slowly and touched the pile of ashes. They were cold—quite cold—but not more so than his own flesh had become. You see, chief, he had remembered—when it was too late. Now that it was all past—now that the terrible, irrevocable deed had been done, and two innocent souls sent to an unmerited fate—suddenly into his reeling brain came the recollection of the cigar he had smoked in that room before the pretended start on his journey. In that terrible moment which seared all the madness of suspicion from the soul of Jean Arnaut forever, I realized, chief, that the cigar and ashes were mine."

"Yours!"

The chief came to his feet in a bound.

"Mine," the man with the sunken eyes reaffirmed. "I—God help me!—am Jean Arnaut."

OUR readers have put the stamp of their heartiest approval on our newest department, the monthly "Weird Story Reprint" of one of the masterpieces of weird fiction. Numerous suggestions are coming in. Strangely enough, many demands are received for the better known masterpieces, and, in response to several requests, we have scheduled Fitz-James O'Brien's *What Was It?* for an early issue. We may even take the ban off Edgar Allan Poe, whose tales we had specifically excluded because we had thought that all lovers of weird fiction were already acquainted with the bizarre stories of this great master. Let us know what masterpieces of weird fiction you think your fellow readers of WEIRD TALES would enjoy, and we will do our best to follow your wishes.

Meantime, the editor wishes to call your attention to the reprint in this issue: *The Furnished Room,* by O. Henry, on page 337. O. Henry so frequently wrote in a light, flippant style, that many will doubtless be surprized at the poignant tragedy and pathos of this exquisite tale of suicide and spirit return. *The Furnished Room* is O. Henry at his artistic height, and it deservedly ranks as one of his very best stories.

Laura O. Tuck, of Weeping Water, Nebraska, writes: "I would suggest that you reprint some of Francis Marion Crawford's stories, for instance *Man Overboard, The Upper Berth* and *The Screaming Skull.* By pure accident I ran across WEIRD TALES last January: it is just what I have been looking for for years. I have looked in vain for this kind of stories in other magazines and digging in odd corners of libraries, but now I know just where to go to get 'my' kind of stories. Please let us have more stories like *The Lure of Atlantis* (in last April's WEIRD TALES), which is my favorite of all the stories I have read so far."

Writes James March, Jr., of Seelyville, Indiana: "*The Werewolf of Ponkert,* my favorite story in the July issue, is something different. Up to this time we have had hints, shadows and glimpses of werewolves. In this story we see them from a direct angle. In other words we almost live with the 'hated things' as we read, which makes this story all the more realistic."

"The vigorous stories found in WEIRD TALES," writes Earl C. Comer, of Los Angeles, "are certainly of tonic value, and especially is this fact realized more when one tries to wade through the sea of flaccid and utterly inane 'literature' of the present day. The stories in the July issue run the whole gamut of weirdness and of unusual situations in far corners of the earth, from the werewolf tale to the utter depravity of dope-users and back again. A good plot in psychic phenomena is *Farthingale's Poppy* by Eli

Colter. Such stories have a peculiar appeal for me. A gripping story of the horrible sufferings of dope-users is found in *The Death Cure* by Paul S. Powers. That one almost causes a nausea of the mind in places, but I would not have missed it because of its graphic description of the two poor devils. In casting about for a kind of mild sedative I ran across *Spear and Fang* by Robert E. Howard—a good story of our remote ancestors before the dawn of civilization and intelligence, when man's reasoning powers were in the formative state. Your July issue affords thrilling entertainment for those who enjoy the unusual. And if you continue to publish such appealing stories, then the well-deserved popularity of WEIRD TALES is certain to grow."

J. A. Rabinowitz, of Staten Island, New York, wants "some more stories by Daudet, Price and Schlossel"; Lorena Skinner, of Los Angeles, asks for "more stories on astronomy and the fourth dimension"; and "Miss E. F.," of Cleveland, Ohio, asks for "more stories of underground dungeons and quicksand pits, swamps, haunted houses, ghosts, ramshackle castles, snakes, spiders, apes, doctors' experiments. Who votes for the above stories speak up," she adds; "we must keep our magazine weird. *Whispering Tunnels* was a riot."

"Having read your July number," writes H. S. Farnese, of Los Angeles, "I vote for *The Stranger From Kurdistan*. Stories with a personal devil are always interesting; hence the popularity of Goethe's *Faust*. And Lovecraft, who wrote *The Unnamable*, scores a hit, as usual. In telling a weird story the style of Mr. Lovecraft can hardly be beaten. Keep him busy."

"WEIRD TALES is the innocent cause of a lot of strife in our household," W. A. Stephan writes from Buffalo, New York, "as the whole family wants to read it at the same time; in fact, I frequently buy two copies so I can read in peace. If I don't, I have to hide it, and it seems that this family missed their vocation—they should have been detectives, if the speed with which they find it is any indication. WEIRD TALES suits me first rate and I hope it will live up to its name in future as successfully as it has done in the past. I would suggest that before you make any radical changes you take a vote on the proposition and count us for five votes against any change."

Alden W. Dyer (we have mislaid the envelope showing what city he comes from) writes to The Eyrie: "I am partial to stories of werewolves, and the more horrifying the better. I think it a shame that your magazine cannot be printed at least twice a month. I have a regular library of WEIRD TALES and keep every copy. After about six months I go over them and read them again. Your magazine is absolutely the only one of its kind in the world. At first my mother objected to my reading your 'weird stories,' but she sat down one night and read the magazine from cover to cover. Now she is just as great an admirer of WEIRD TALES as I am."

"The June number was one of the best of recent issues," writes Aaron Glaser of New York City, "not because of any *one* story of exceptional merit, but because each and every story was a little gem in itself. However, as a definite choice is desired, I would say that I derived the most enjoyment from Mortimer Levitan's *The Third Thumb-print* because of its fine technique and startling climax. Also, as usual, Gordon Philip England was 'there with the goods' in *The House, the Light, and the Man*. As for *Hurled Into the Infinite*, I can only say that if the second part is as interesting and exciting as the first, the story in its entirety must be excellent indeed."

T. E. Sanders, of Norfolk, Virginia, who has been reading WEIRD TALES since its very first issue, writes to The Eyrie: "Your yarn *Under the N-Ray*,

by Smith and Robbins, was the finest thing in its class I have ever read. Not since good old Jack London's *Before Adam* has anything appealed to me as that story did. Why can't we have more along the general lines of that one? Wish you could see your way clear to run some of Ambrose Bierce's among your *Weird Story Reprints.* He was the noblest Roman of them all. Your stories are all good, and some are superlative; so keep on as you are, and I think we readers will be satisfied."

"Here's hoping we get more *weird* stories and that they get weirder and weirder," writes Betty Rice, of Skowhegan, Maine. "The weirder they are the better I like them."

Writes Allan Lee, of Portage la Prairie, Manitoba: "Such stories as *Under the N-Ray* and *The Voices From the Cliff,* about scientific wonders and strange natural phenomena, appeal to the imagination and provide good, clean and extremely interesting entertainment, and I would like to see more of that kind in WEIRD TALES. But you have everybody to please, and tastes differ, for if you only have one or two stories of this type in an issue, you will have my continued enthusiastic interest."

Well, folks, next month we will give you a story in which scientific interest and stark horror are so closely interknit that you can not separate one from the other without injuring the story. It is called *The Horror on the Links,* and it is by Seabury Quinn; and if it will not make the gooseflesh creep along your spine and delicious little shivers chase each other under your skin as the horror grows and accumulates—if it will not do this, we say, then we don't know a true horror-story when we see one. The author has become facetious about his own story, in a letter to the editor, and has given us a choice of limericks about it from the *Complete Limerick Book:*

A menagerie came to our place,
And I loved the gorilla's grimace.
It surprized me to learn
That he owned the concern,
Being human, but odd in the face.

Or this:

There was a young man of Westphalia,
Who yearly grew tail-ier and tail-ier,
Till he took on the shape
Of a Barbary Ape,
With the consequent paraphernalia.

Three stories fought it out for the readers' especial favor in the July issue: *The Werewolf of Ponkert,* by H. Warner Munn; *Farthingale's Poppy,* Eli Colter's tale of a will that reached from beyond the tomb; and *The Stranger From Kurdistan,* E. Hoffmann Price's very short tale of devil-worship. It may be wondered why a four-page "filler" story such as *The Stranger From Kurdistan* found so much favor with the readers, but we believe the reason is Mr. Price's perfect story-technique, the ingenuity of his story plot, and the purple splendor of his style. Another story by him, *The Sultan's Jest,* appears in the present issue.

What is YOUR favorite story in this month's WEIRD TALES? Send in your vote to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Indiana. And if you have any criticisms or suggestions to make, tell us about them. This magazine belongs to you, the readers, and we want to keep it responsive to your wishes. So let us know whether we please you or not.

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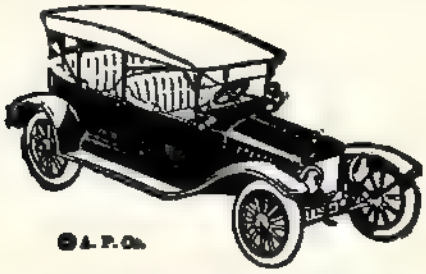

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The Gargoyle

(Continued from page 312)

morning fled, and when luncheon was announced he hardly cared to leave his work, which was shaping up in a most gratifying manner.

"After luncheon, I'll pose again," Sybil promised, fluttering around the easel in delight at the more than vague promise Luke had given to her portrait. "Come, Luke. Let's hurry with lunch."

The dining room in Fanewold Castle was extraordinarily handsome. Luke betrayed his artist's interest the moment it burst upon him. It was beautifully paneled with solid mahogany, to judge from the massiveness of the carving that decorated the wood. Around the entire room ran a jutting balcony, enclosed in a marvelously carved balustrade. Above this was a lattice-work screen. For just what purpose this screen had been designed, Luke did not know, but he concluded that it afforded a fine vantage point from which an invisible observer could look down into the room.

Sybil waited, standing by her chair at the table. Presently a woman entered the room, a woman of proud dignity, tall, stately, but a wreck of what must once have been magnificent womanhood. Flashing black eyes gleamed under heavy brows still black, making a strange contrast with snowy hair, piled high. Never had the artist seen a more melancholy and interesting countenance than that of Madam Fane. He could the better observe it now, than at a distance as he had the night previous. The simplicity of her coiffure made more pronounced the sophistication of the concealed fires smoldering in the twin volcanoes under her heavy brows; those occasional brilliant flashes betrayed the vivid and powerfully restrained personality.

Rarely, however, did she raise her heavy lids to look anyone directly in the eye; rather did she turn her face slightly, replying in monosyllables which discouraged direct conversation with her. A strange, silent woman, who gave the impression of forces ill-spent in coping vainly with something bigger than herself, and hence chary of so little energy or vitality as might escape her in a single word.

Sybil seated herself after Madam Fane, and motioned Luke to pay no attention to her aunt, as the girl called the older woman.

Conversation during luncheon lagged. This might have been Madam Fane's cold abstraction, or Sybil's intimation that Guy Fane lunched on the balcony, hidden behind the lattice. There was something, too, ominous and oppressive in the older woman's heavy glance, which Luke more than once found fixed with strange intensity upon either Sybil or himself.

Nor was this all. He felt as if a thousand mocking, evil eyes were watching his every movement from behind that lattice, although the brilliantly lighted dining room must have been hard on Guy Fane's weak eyes, unless the Master was posing with regard to his mysterious malady. Luke was glad when the meal was over, and Sybil drew him back to the garden to finish her portrait.

An inquiry as to the whereabouts of Herbert Binney led to the response from the girl that he was probably with her cousin, preparing himself for the greatest experiment of all, the subject of which she was ignorant about, but for which her cousin had prepared her mentally to look forward joyfully. Cagliostro, in effect, did not show up all the afternoon. At dinner, however, he ap-

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peared; serious, distant of mien, obviously wrapped up in his thoughts. Luke's attempts to draw him into conversation met with decided rebuff; the occultist took himself seriously. Whether or not the Master had divulged the object of his experiments, Luke could not discover without a private conversation with Cagliostro, and Cagliostro evaded him neatly after dinner.

The autumn evening had grown slightly chill. Sybil therefore led the way to her boudoir, a charming room where she had a piano, a harp, and a violin. Her taste, she told Luke, had run largely to music, because it stirred her emotions so beautifully. Guy had provided teachers (women always) from time to time, but for some reason none of them remained long.

"Just when they were getting interesting," Sybil said regretfully, "and were telling me more about the outside world, they disappeared. But I've learned to amuse myself a lot with music, Luke. Shall I play to you?"

She played. The evening wore on to 11 o'clock. Mason appeared in the doorway with a silver tray on which steamed the spiced wine which Luke suspected of soporific qualities. Sybil sipped hers innocently enough, but Luke managed to avoid drinking the nightcap, except for a few mouthfuls, which he took partly out of sheer curiosity and partly to disarm the waiting and watchful Mason.

THAT night Luke let himself slip into a half sleep, induced probably by what little wine he had taken, and partly by lack of much sleep the night before. In some subtle manner, strange thoughts entered his unguarded mind—wild dreams through which flitted figures clad in medieval vestures, carrying tall candlesticks with flickering lights atop. As he dozed, he seemed to hear snatches of talk. So much a dream was it, that he did not make the necessary effort to awake and make sure that it was imagination only.

A figure short and ungainly, with veiled face, obtruded itself. To his half-dazed consciousness there seemed to be an atmosphere thick, murky,

prescious in the vicinity of this veiled being, an atmosphere weighing so heavily upon his spirits that he felt his throat choking physically. But the sensation was also of a moral cast, a shrinking of the higher senses with repugnance. Another figure, tall and thin, impressed him with deep, shuddering pity, such as one might feel for a soul that regards its own deliberate ruin with affright, yet holds to its terrible course as if chained by bonds too powerful to be broken.

"He is a handsome fellow," a voice murmured. "These fine shapely limbs please me well."

A hand touched Luke lightly. At the loathsome contact he shrank with a half moan. There was a grim laugh. The speaker leaned more closely over the sleeper, who began to draw gasping breaths as if oppressed beyond endurance.

"How my very nearness affects this youth! The spells of Lord Lucifer have indeed been powerful. They have made me another and loftier being than mere man."

Awful pride rang in the words.

"Tell me, dear mother," mockingly, "how long it will be for this youth to grow so ardent in his wooing that Sybil's susceptible heart, so carefully prepared, will yield to his lovemaking?"

"If they are not for each other, it will be never," declared Madam Fane.

"Oh, how you love to croak your woful prophecies! Lucifer, Lord Lucifer, grant my prayer soon! I can wait no longer! My monstrous—my execrable—body is poisoning my soul with detestation!"

"You will waken him," warned the other. "He is starting and muttering in his sleep. Come!"

Both figures melted into nothingness. Luke fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

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The Were-Snake

(Continued from page 398)

answer; I sought assurance. There was a sort of malicious cruelty in the silence, and I sought to lessen the torture, to ease the tension as I crawled forward on my hands and knees.

"Miss Beardsley, you must have faith. I am coming for you on my hands and knees. The way is long, and there will be much pain—but you must fight Ishtar through your will!"

"Arthur, it is squeezing me. It is soft, and I cannot grip it. It flips away from me. You must hurry! But I shall not fear, Arthur. Fear is deadly, and will destroy us both."

Long and white and smooth was the passage that opened out before me, and ran down into the earth. Into my mind came fragments of horrid superstition, and malicious memory, and a phrase from Joseph Glanvill which Poe had once quoted: "the vastness, profundity, and unsearchableness of His works, which have a depth in them greater than the well of Democritus!"

The passage before me was a tunnel of nightmare, and with my brain I doubted; but I saw the tunnel clearly, and the light streaming out of it.

And the thing that had carried Miss Beardsley over the rough ground, the thing of slime and night, had crept into the tunnel, and it did not expect me to follow. Or did it expect me to follow?

Through interminable windings and turnings I clambered on my hands and knees. The tunnel narrowed and threatened to embrace me, and then it widened until I could not glimpse in the wavering light its high, sloping top. Forward I pressed through the shadows, and shouted and wept in the darkness; and far ahead

I heard an audible swishing, as the thing crawled through the damp cold, leaving a trail of slime and unspeakable odor in its wake.

The impressions left me by that horrible descent were profoundly grave and unforgettable. But some destiny over which I had no control had arranged that I should suffer, and as I crawled downward on my hands and knees I knew that no bestial god could survive that destiny. Suffering and terror would be mine, but out of the night would come a marvelous dawn, and the confused discords about me would somehow harmonize one with the other, and I should listen with exaltation and ecstasy to a gorgeous and stupendous symphony. I would return from the brink of the pit, and Miss Beardsley and I would face the new dawn together. Why is a cold, ill-lighted tunnel that twists and turns superior to the darkness? Why did I feel a resurgence of confidence as I moved forward over the cold ground?

For eternities I crawled forward on my hands and knees, and then, quite unexpectedly, upon turning a bend I *saw* it. Stupendous and awful! And to think that one might anywhere, unexpectedly, come upon such an abomination. "What is the use of going on?" I thought. "This thing cannot be. If it exists there is no longer any reason for living—if it exists we are all hopeless, helpless, wretched creatures living in an hallucination, living on the edge of an abyss, living in a dream from which it is death to awake. We live surrounded by a Walpurgis night of obscene shapes; flaffing harpies that would tear out our brains and glut upon our bodies in sleep; ghoulish, black-lipped incubi; serpents of nightmare from Acheron; Calibans

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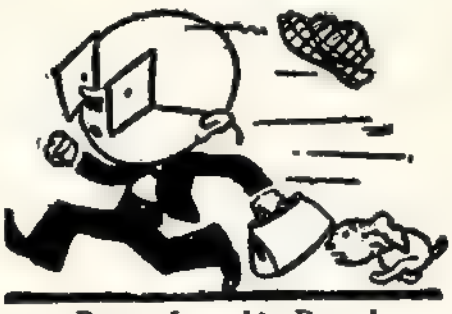

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from Tartarus; we live surrounded by famine and pestilence and death—if such as this can exist under the stars!"

I gnawed at the ends of my fingers to keep from shrieking. Miss Beardsley lay in a pool of ooze, the muscles of her face relaxed; and an awful, indescribable agony shone in her eyes. Her arms hung limp at her sides, but the fingers of her right hand opened and closed convulsively. Above her in the dim light, its face in profile against a dark, ageless boulder, crouched the thing that I had followed through the darkness, the shadowy, lethal thing of unutterable evil that had left a dark, noisome trail of slime behind it.

Its doglike head was covered with scales, and a long, reptilian tongue protruded from between its black, bulbous lips. Its eye in profile seemed large and gray; but the tunnel-light had glazed it, and it no longer glittered. It was quite hopeless from a sane or human point of view, and when I raised my arm in a gesture of despair and fury it hissed, and spat at me. I knew that I should shiver and grow frigid at its touch. For a moment I did not think that I could ever move again; and I wondered if Miss Beardsley suffered pain. I longed to soothe and console her, to assure her that I understood.

"I shall attend to this!" I said, but I had no intention of attending to anything. My mind ran in one narrow channel, to the exclusion of everything that should have concerned me. "If it does not move, I am safe," I thought. I stood very still, fearing that if I moved an inch I should bring it down upon me. In fancy I felt its cold nostril nuzzling my face. I knew that it would nuzzle me and nuzzle me until I perished of horror and loathing. I was more upset than I cared to acknowledge. I

suppose I thought of Miss Beardsley; but one thing comes back now, and shames me—my vile, shocking cowardice.

But something destroyed my shivering inhibition of muscle and will, and sent me forward like a released spring. *I saw its body!* The head had held me back, and tied my muscles into knots, and filled me with shameless fright; but the body called for quick, decisive action. I went forward instantly, and did what I had to do. But before I joined with it in that foggy earth-crypt I bent with amazing agility, and picked from the ground a thin, sharp stone.

I remember severing with one stroke the great, doglike head, and I remember how the black arterial blood ran out of the neck and spattered over my arms and legs. I know that the body twisted and writhed in the cavern gloom, and tied itself into knots, and monstrous, fleshy folds.

I can see it now, writhing and twisting in the shadows; and I see the severed head lying beside Miss Beardsley on the ground. The jaws open and close; and the eyes are amazed, almost indignant, like the eyes of a child who has been punished for what it does not consider a wrong.

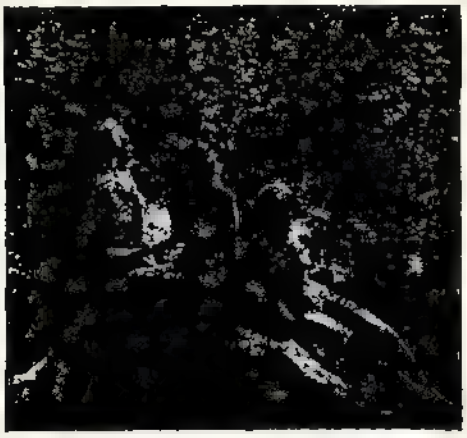
When I had finished, and the folds lay still, I got up and walked over to where Miss Beardsley lay upon the cold, hard ground. I realized that sympathy and pity would never do. Miss Beardsley needed more drastic medicine.

"Get up!" I shouted at her. "I don't intend to stand here and wait for you. Get up!"

Miss Beardsley moaned, and her lips quivered; but a pink tinge crept back into her cheeks.

"Get up at once!" I shouted.

A moment more and she was on her feet, her blue eyes flashing with anger,



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and a red blush covering her throat and cheeks. I knew then that she was saved, and I drew her quickly toward me, and away from the headless thing on the ground.

"We'll be in time for breakfast," I told her. "I have ordered ostrich eggs and pomegranates. We shall sit on the terrace and watch the dawn come up over the desert!"

"Oh, but my aunt never rises so early," said Miss Beardsley.

"For once," I responded, "we shall do without a chaperon."

I led her out into the cool night. For a moment we stood under the gray wall of the temple of Ishtar, and then we walked, arm in arm, toward the hotel. "You are worth a dozen Ishtars," I told her.

"That is not very complimentary," she said. "To tell me that I am only worth—"

In a moment my arms were about her, and I knew the sweet magic of her yielding body.

3

AT NOON my guide came to me. "You will never guess what we found in the ruin," he said.

"A snake?" I asked.

His face became horribly solemn. "Yes, and no! We found a headless woman! But that is not all. The gray sacrificial stone was covered with blood; and upon it lay the head of a snake—a hooded cobra!"

Miss Beardsley shivered, and plucked at my sleeve: "In the village they tell queer tales. They say—they say that *you* killed Ishtar!"

My guide's small eyes narrowed. "Yes," he said. "And we are grateful. Your courage has delivered us from Ishtar—the were-snake!"

Below the balcony our camels eyed us with tolerant, disillusioned eyes.

The Temple

(Continued from page 336)

empty sodium bromide glass of which I had had no former visual impression in its present location. This last circumstance made me ponder, and I crossed the room and touched the glass. It was indeed in the place where I had seemed to see it. Now I knew that the light was either real or part of an hallucination so fixed and consistent that I could not hope to dispel it, so abandoning all resistance I ascended to the conning tower to look for the luminous agency. Might it not actually be another U-boat, offering possibilities of rescue?

It is well that the reader accept nothing which follows as objective truth, for since the events transcend natural law, they are necessarily the subjective and unreal creations of my overtaxed mind. When I attained the conning tower I found the sea in general far less luminous than I had expected. There was no animal or vegetable phosphorescence about, and the city that sloped down to the river was invisible in blackness. What I did see was not spectacular, not grotesque or terrifying, yet it removed my last vestige of trust in my consciousness. *For the door and windows of the undersea temple hewn from the rocky hill were vividly aglow with a flickering radiance, as from a mighty altar-flame far within.*

Later incidents are chaotic. As I stared at the uncannily lighted door and windows, I became subject to the most extravagant visions—visions so extravagant that I cannot even relate them. I fancied that I discerned objects in the temple; objects both stationary and moving; and seemed to hear again the unreal chant that had floated to me when first I awaked. And over all rose thoughts and fears which centered in the youth from the

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sea and the ivory image whose carving was duplicated on the frieze and columns of the temple before me. I thought of poor Klenze, and wondered where his body rested with the image he had carried back into the sea. He had warned me of something, and I had not heeded—but he was a soft-headed Rhinelander who went mad at troubles a Prussian could bear with ease.

THE rest is very simple. My impulse to visit and enter the temple has now become an inexplicable and imperious command which ultimately cannot be denied. My own German will no longer controls my acts, and volition is henceforward possible only in minor matters. Such madness it was which drove Klenze to his death, bareheaded and unprotected in the ocean; but I am a Prussian and man of sense, and will use to the last what little will I have. When first I saw that I must go, I prepared my diving suit, helmet, and air regenerator for instant donning; and immediately commenced to write this hurried chronicle in the hope that it may some day reach the world. I shall seal the manuscript in a bottle and entrust it to the sea as I leave the U-29 for ever.

I have no fear, not even from the prophecies of the madman Klenze. What I have seen cannot be true, and I know that this madness of my own will at most lead only to suffocation when my air is gone. The light in the temple is a sheer delusion, and I shall die calmly, like a German, in the black and forgotten depths. This demoniac laughter which I hear as I write comes only from my own weakening brain. So I will carefully don my diving suit and walk boldly up the steps into that primal shrine; that silent secret of unfathomed waters and uncounted years.

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